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JETHRO:

A SYSTEM OF LAY AGENCY,

IN CONNEXION WITH

Congregational Churches,

FOR THE DIFFUSION OF THE GOSPEL AMONG OUR

HOME POPULATION.

By John Campbell

This thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to bear it thyself alone; thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.—*Jethro, Exod.* xviii.

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ADVERTISEMENT

BY THE

COMMITTEE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES.

The public are indebted for the following Essay to the generous zeal of a Christian philanthropist, whose mind was influenced by a deep concern for the further evangelization of his native land. He felt also a strong anxiety that the Congregational churches of his country should bear a more vigorous and a more adequate part in this great and urgently necessary work. In order to this, it appeared to him indispensable, that the Independent churches and pastors should employ, to a greater extent than heretofore, the zeal and activity of brethren qualified for useful labours among their ignorant countrymen, though not regularly educated for the Christian ministry. To invite attention to this important object, and to elicit discussion on the best methods for accomplishing it, he determined to offer a prize of ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS for the best Essay on the subject of Lay Agency. That additional interest and sanction might be given to the proceeding, he proposed that the management of it should be undertaken by the Committee of the CONGREGATIONAL UNION. The Committee, prepared to promote whatever might seem adapted to advance the efficiency of the Independent churches, ob-

tained the sanction of the Annual Assembly of the Union in the year 1838, for the proposal of their generous friend, and for their co-operation in carrying it into effect. A second prize of twenty-five guineas, for the Essay that might be adjudged next in merit, was also added on the part of the Union. The necessary publicity was then given to the proposal in the name of the Committee of the Union; and the Rev. J. Bennett, D.D., the Rev. J. Fletcher, D.D., and Joshua Wilson, Esq., were appointed to be adjudicators of the merits of such Essays as might be presented on the subject. To those gentlemen, it was matter of high satisfaction, that many of the compositions submitted to their examination were so eminently indicative of the piety, zeal, and talent of their respective authors; and while they endeavoured to decide with the utmost regard to impartiality and justice, they trust, that some of the writers will give the results of their labours to the public. The *first* prize has been awarded to the following Essay. Of course, neither the Committee of the Union, nor the adjudicators, incur responsibility for all the sentiments it may contain; but they unite in the hope, that it may contribute to more zealous efforts—never more needed than now—for the spread of pure and undefiled religion among the neglected population of our own country; and throw light on the main question to be discussed, namely, how Congregational churches may most efficiently, in harmony with their own polity, order, and prosperity, employ their non-ministerial brethren in active labours for the spread of the Gospel around them.

Algernon Wells,
Secretary to the Union.

Congregational Library,
14th August, 1839.

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PREFACE.

In the following pages, an attempt has been made to open the whole question of lay agency, and to embody the experience of the Protestant world, with respect to its excellencies, its evils, its management, and its various modes of operation. Modern illustrations, to a great extent, have, for obvious reasons, been drawn from the National Church Establishments—a quarter, where their supply forms a new and remarkable feature of our times.

It is hoped, that the subject of Chapter VI. will be deeply pondered—its principles appreciated—and the necessity perceived for carrying them fully out in the Congregational churches. In Chapter VII., the order of nature has been followed, with regard to the departments of labour—an order which has been too generally neglected or reversed. The stedfast and uniform observance of this order, however, lies at the foundation of all real strength and spiritual prosperity in Christian churches, and of all extensive and permanent efficiency, in their evangelical operations. The members of churches, their children, and their congregations, respectively, must receive individual attention, and personal instruction, to an extent which has never yet been bestowed upon them, before Scripture Christianity can spread and prosper in our land.

In Chapter VIII., a measure of space and of disquisition has been devoted to the several classes of lay agents, in proportion to their relative importance, in the field of labour. On this principle, great prominence has been assigned to the subject of Sabbath-school teachers and catechists, who, when they shall have been properly trained, organized, and put in their right position, will one day be found a body of agents of inestimable value to Christian pastors, as mighty instruments in furthering the kingdom of God. Although the catechists are placed, necessarily, second in order, they are to be viewed as first in importance, and as next to the ministry itself. It is absolutely indispensable, that the fourfold catechetical course here delineated should immediately succeed to that of the Sunday-school. Every successive generation of scholars, on having passed through the public Sabbath-classes, ought to be incorporated with the private catechetical classes. This should, on all hands, be considered a matter of course. By this system alone can the religious education of our youth be efficiently carried on, and thoroughly completed. This view of the subject is powerfully supported by analogy. In a complete course of worldly education, there is a gradation of institutions, by which the recipients of secular tuition are carried forward, until they be at length ushered into the field of active life; and until this dictate of common sense be followed, in matters of religion, it is in vain that we look for the general prevalence of enlightened piety, or for the appearance of able and well-informed men—with respect to divine things—in such numbers as to yield adequate assistance to the ministry of the word in diffusing

the Gospel around our churches, and throughout our country.

It is a circumstance of considerable importance, that lay agency, in the forms of teachers, catechists, helpers, and expositors, is very little liable to abuse; and, we believe, it never has been made a subject of serious complaint by right-minded men, in any denomination of Protestants. The respective spheres of these classes of agents are too small for unhallowed ambition to blaze in; vulgar vanity will find them to be "a dry and thirsty land," without the means of quenching its ardours; and fanaticism will always seek a loftier theatre of display, and a field encumbered with fewer checks. It is, indeed, hardly conceivable, how any evil can come out of the employment of these various orders of agents. The fact is so perfectly in unison with the testimony of universal experience, as to render any defence of it wholly superfluous.

Lay agency has been so much identified with *preaching*, that many persons cannot conceive of it in any other form; and not a few, who scornfully repudiate it in that, are its strenuous advocates in those other modes, which have just been specified. We cordially hail all such patrons of lay labour. They go with us four-fifths of the way; and we shall have no dispute about the remainder. He who has advanced thus far, may soon proceed to the end of the journey. Compared with this great and daily augmenting host of various agents, whom they approve, the whole existing body of lay preachers in the realm is but a handful; and the same may be said of the comparative numbers of human beings upon whom they, respectively,

operate. This department of lay effort, however, although but one of a number, and in some respects inferior, is, nevertheless, considered absolutely, one of great importance; and, with due attention to the rules laid down in this system for its management, it may most safely be carried on to any extent that circumstances render necessary.

As in laying out the several fields of labour, no part of the extended territory has been left unappropriated; so in marshalling the classes of agents, none have been omitted, whose aid is considered necessary to the effective spread of the Gospel among the ignorant and irreligious population of our own land, both in town and country.

The illustrations of the admirable working of the district system, furnished in the sixth chapter of the following treatise, show, that a chief element in the arrangements and plans there detailed and set forth, was a provision for the sick and infirm members. Had the conditions, which regulated the present composition, permitted, we should gladly have embraced the opportunity of giving that point a full consideration. As it is, we must rest satisfied, for the present, with calling attention to the production of a celebrated Scottish pen—"A CURE FOR PAUPERISM proposed in a Letter to the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D. D., Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, and recommended to public attention by the Right Honourable Sir John Sinclair, Bart." The object of the gifted author of this wise and humane pamphlet—the Rev. Dr. Adam Thomson, of Coldstream—is, to simplify the principles and to extend the benefits of *Friendly Societies* to

the whole body of every Christian congregation in the kingdom. His plan embraces male and female, old and young, rich and poor. The sagacious author's own conclusion, in which the bulk of the Scotch periodicals largely, and, we think, rightly concur, is :—"That if it were the universal practice for members of all Christian churches, Established and Dissenting, to join Friendly Societies, on the plan here proposed, there would really remain comparatively few cases of distress to be provided for, either by private charity or parochial assessment."

The subject is clearly one of the greatest importance to Christian pastors, deacons, and churches. It is remarkable, that so little has been done in this way for averting distress. The thing is left to individual prudence, which, in the immense majority of instances, turns out to be individual negligence, with its attendant calamities. It will never be otherwise, till taken up congregationally, and led on by the ministers of Christ. We rejoice to find this view embraced in the great organ of the Scottish Establishment—the *Christian Instructor*—in which a writer, speaking of ministers in relation to it, exclaims—"What a fine field for their usefulness! What a rich boon they would thereby confer upon their country!"

It is certain, from the known laws of human nature, that the introduction of this element would variously and powerfully affect the character and contribute to the success of our district system. Its invaluable temporal bearings would do much, in the first instance, to reconcile many to its duties, till habit and the experience of spiritual benefit shall have led, not simply to cordial concurrence,

but to strong attachment. It would greatly conduce to the popularity, utility, and perpetuity of the whole district organization. While true piety would constitute its soul and marrow, this would serve as bones and sinews to the entire fabric. The efficient management of this matter will not require the addition of a single particle to the machinery. The contribution will be paid at the same time as the weekly penny; and the disbursements will form part of the monthly business. The district economy will thus serve two objects—both of the first importance—and both congruous and coincident.

This subject claims the serious attention of the Congregational ministry, not simply as an instrument of spiritual good, but also as a duty which they owe to their flocks in relation to temporalities, and as a measure of ecclesiastical policy. The Bishop of Winchester, in his primary charge, thus pathetically and profoundly lays down the principle, when, in speaking of the Christian pastor, the prelate says—"He must grudge no teaching which may tend to build up his people in their most holy faith, and withhold no good office which may minister to their earthly well-being. He will not think the name of temporal guardian, protector, and friend of his people, ill assorted with that of spiritual guide, so that he may smooth the ruggedness of their earthly path, and carry them on with him through the working of their natural affection, in the way that leads to eternal life." The working clergy are extensively alive to the importance of this great principle, and, like Oberlin, they are carrying it out with much effect; many of them are, with great success, employ-

ing the frame-work of economical prudence to bind the affections of the multitude to the horns of the national altars.*

The writer, with respectful deference, submits his views —views maturely formed and long cherished, whatever may be their imperfections—to the judgment of the servants, in general, of "the Most High God, which shew unto men the way of salvation," and, in particular, to the British and American Congregational churches, with their bishops and deacons, in the humble hope, and with the earnest prayer, that they may subserve the labours of the pastorship, and so contribute to the advancement of the divine glory by diffusing the Gospel of mercy among our home population.

* This subject amply merits separate discussion—meanwhile we would refer to Dr. Thomson's "Cure," &c.; to Seymour's Sermon preached in the parish church of Stratford-upon-Avon, to the Becher and Victoria Clubs, with its excellent Appendix; to the publications of Mr Becher, of Southwell, with his evidence before the Poor Law Commissioners; to Pratt and Tamlyn's writings on the subject; to Ansell on Friendly Societies; Norman's Statement, &c.

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CHAPTER I.

ON THE NECESSITY OF INCREASED EFFORTS TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

GREAT BRITAIN is, at the present time, the principal instructor of heathen nations in the doctrines of Christianity, while itself but very imperfectly christianized. It is happily true, that the religion of Jesus Christ has spread through the country, and occupied a multitude of impregnable fortresses; but still it can only be considered in the light of a strong invader, whose position is one of peril and conflict, not of conquest and repose. A right apprehension of its real state will serve at once to reveal the duty of the faithful, and to point out the proper method of its performance. To diffuse the blessings of the "common salvation" is the common duty of the whole church of God; should we, therefore, address ourselves more especially and emphatically to one denomination, yet we must be understood as virtually speaking to the entire body of British Christians.

A correct and faithful exhibition of the true state of religion and morals in our country, and of the times which are passing over us, will demonstrate the peculiarly pressing necessity of increased efforts, on the part of Congregational churches, to propagate the Gospel on every hand, and by every means. While the principal ground of that necessity is, doubtless, the command of Christ, and the spiritual condition of the empire; yet there are collateral circumstances and considerations which ought to receive their due weight, and which, if any thing could add to the urgency resulting from the doleful cry of perishing millions, must supply fresh and further stimulus to those efforts.

The successful prosecution of missionary enterprise abroad, imperatively demands the extension and invigoration of our home Christianity. The root of the missionary vine, whose branches have already stretched over so many lands, and which must one day envelope our globe, is planted in England. It consists of the home churches; and it requires and demands an immense annual augmentation of sustenance and nourishment, without which its extending boughs in foreign climes must speedily wither, and ultimately die. The cause of our home population is, therefore, in the highest sense, the cause of the heathen; and he who does most to promote the salvation of his country, is the best benefactor of missions to the Gentiles. Whatever leads to the establishment of new churches, or the increase of small churches, or the revival of slumbering churches, is a primary step towards the conversion of the world.

The land is full of strange appearances. A spirit has

gone forth among the established churches of the empire, wholly unknown in the days of our fathers, and as yet hardly familiar to ourselves. Much that has been spoken and written, of late years, and more that has been done, have been ominous of objects decidedly adverse to the maintenance of the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. To this we must add the fact, that the Roman Catholics are every where secretly or openly at work to regain their lost possessions and dominion, and advancing to power and influence, with giant strides, in a course of wise and well-directed action; while, to say the least, a fountain of Popish sympathy has burst forth in the very heart of the church of England,* by which the MAN OF SIN has been avowedly refreshed as with new wine. These facts may well suffice to arouse from their slumber the Non-conformists of England. They assuredly indicate the commencement of a mingled and a mighty conflict—a conflict in certain quarters for a withering ecclesiastical monopoly, a towering and crushing supremacy, and some-

* The Dissenters of England have not been more distinguished as the bulwark of her civil and religious freedom, than as the conservators of her theological truth. Their latter function, it is to be feared, is one of a permanent character. The Church Catechism, Creeds, and Articles, have done right little in preserving for her a pure administration of the word of God in the parochial pulpits. Eminent churchmen of other times have neither been insensible to their obligation, nor ashamed to confess it. The following is the honest testimony of the celebrated Dr. Edwards:—

"If we would open our eyes, we should see that we are beholden to the Dissenters for the continuance of a great part of our theological principles; for if the high churchmen had no checks, they would have brought in Popery before this time, by their overvaluing pomp and ceremony in divine worship. So that if there had been no Dissenters, the church of England had been long since ruined.—*Preacher*, vol. ii. p. 133.

thing more, which, unless the Independents awake, must, sooner or later, involve them in a dire, though not doubtful, struggle for existence as an ecclesiastical body.

There are other concomitants, however, of a more encouraging character, which ought to exert a powerful influence on the minds of the pastors and churches of the Congregational body. The Wesleyan Methodists, who have never slept one hour since the memorable era when they sprang into existence, have waked up into new and stronger life; and they are preparing, by efforts of labour and of liberality, which do them honour, for still higher achievements in the Gospel field, both at home and abroad. The legitimate tendency of these deeds is to provoke their Non-conformist brethren to love and to good works. Then there are the principal denominations of Presbyterian dissenters in Scotland, who have taken a position and assumed an attitude wholly new. These most intelligent and well-organized bodies are united as one man in defence of the great fundamental principle of Christ's kingdom, and, together with the Independents, are making such a stand against the rapacious and intolerant arrogance of a dominant church, as Dissent never before made in any age, or in any country. These bodies are acting in such harmony, with such wisdom and energy, that they have fairly baffled both the power and the policy of the established clergy, and compelled them to resort to the very principle, which has been by them so fiercely repudiated,—the voluntary support of their adherents,—as the only available method of extending and supporting their system. All this, however, is to be considered only as a means to a higher and still nobler end—the present

diffusion of truth, and the ultimate promotion of unity among all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

There is already much to report from Scotland on both these subjects; and yet, unless appearances, full of promise, shall prove deceitful, the matter of such report is only the first fruits of an abundant harvest.

It is, therefore, time, on every ground, for the Dissenters of England seriously to look at these facts and phenomena. It is indispensable that, as a body, they take into consideration the alarming state of their country, in those things which appertain to salvation. They are required also, as a preliminary measure, to ponder the spiritual condition of their own denomination, which, with all its excellence, demands increased preparation for usefulness. A denomination cannot impart what it does not possess; an army chiefly or largely composed of invalids, constitute but a feeble defence of an invaded empire, and are still less capable of acting themselves the part of invaders, and rolling over it the tide of conquest. The day is, therefore, come for a searching inquiry into the real spiritual character of their existing fellowships, the ecclesiastical posture of their children, and the state and claims of their congregations, as preparatory to aggressive movements; for their attitude must no longer continue to be one of mere defence. They are summoned to embark in a general war of aggression on the kingdom of darkness, error, and wretchedness, that they may do all that in them lies to fill the land with light, truth, and love.

We must, therefore, proceed to inquire into the duty of the Congregational body of the British empire, as resulting from the spiritual condition of their country; the

character of the instrumentality best adapted to promote its welfare; the preparation necessary to the successful employment of that instrumentality; the various departments of evangelical labour; the different classes of Christian agency; the objections which may be raised to the proposed system; and the peculiar duties of the Congregational body of England and Wales, arising from their position, their principles, and their relations.

The state of England is, on every account, entitled to priority of investigation; and, in prosecuting that enquiry, our attention must be first directed to the metropolis.

SECTION I.

OF THE STATE OF MORALS IN THE METROPOLIS.

London is of itself a great kingdom.—It is the seat of government, of law, of learning, and of the arts.—It is the resort and place of partial residence of the wealth and rank of the whole empire.—It is likewise the first commercial and manufacturing city on the face of the earth, with a population in and about it approaching to two millions of souls, and with a yearly rental exceeding seven millions, sterling. London, therefore, considered absolutely and by itself, with respect to its spiritual condition, supplies a theme of overwhelming interest; but, when viewed in relation to the provinces of England, to the rest of the empire, to the nations of Europe, and to

the whole earth, it acquires an importance which exceeds all human calculation or comprehension. This vast city exerts an influence throughout the entire civilized world; nor is that influence wholly unfelt in the most distant climes, and barbarous regions.—Here are assembled men of all nations, peoples, kindreds, and tongues. It is calculated that not less than 120,000 strangers are continually present, on a stay of greater or less duration; that 20,000 daily enter it, and that 20,000 daily depart. London is the great meeting place of the human family, and the vestibule of the world. From the river Thames men may find a way to every spot of the habitable globe. On these and other grounds, therefore, the greatest imaginable importance attaches to the moral and spiritual condition of the British metropolis. Whatever be its qualities, they cannot be confined to itself, It is a fountain, whose waters, whether sweet or bitter, are ever bursting forth from their mighty caverns, and rolling on, in resistless torrents, to the ends of the earth. Its situation is wholly peculiar, and its improvement is closely related to the improvement of the whole world. The attention of Congregational churches, therefore, ought to be intensely directed to the spiritual condition of the capital.

It is necessary to classify the population, while we proceed to examine their state, into the lower, middle, and higher orders. The lower classes, on several accounts, claim precedence—they constitute the majority, and the multitude, compared with whom the other classes are but a handful. Investigation will develope a state of things amongst these immortal masses, which may make the ears

of the hearer to tingle,—which will convict the Christian churches of the capital of the most culpable neglect of duty, and shew the awful necessity of immediately adopting all practicable methods of rescuing its lost myriads from perdition. The source of all sin is ignorance of God, which prevails among these classes to an extent not easily to be credited by those who have had little or limited experience among them. Of the immense majority, it may be most truly said, that "God is not in all their thoughts." If they could be selected and separated into a city by themselves, they would present a population as blind, corrupt, and brutish, as could be furnished from any city of the heathen world—they are seared in conscience, almost divested of moral sense, and sunk into all but hopeless degradation.—They are in all respects "earthly, sensual, devilish," without God, and without hope in the world.

A leading test of piety is respect for the Lord's day. An application of this test to the lower classes of London will conduct us to distressing conclusions. With not a few it is a hard day of worldly business, and with most a laborious day of sinful pleasure. It is an undeniable fact, that, to immense throngs, it is their chief weekly market-day; and, oh, what scenes such markets exhibit! What sights of poverty and misery! What sounds of obscenity, profanity, impiety! The most retired streets and lower markets are crowded; the gin-shops are full, and their doors surrounded with small groups of men, women, and children, their infatuated, faithful customers. Thus one section of the populace commences the day, but how is it terminated? Who shall describe the afternoon

and evening of a London sabbath, when the weather is fine or favourable? Who shall depict the aspect of the river Thames, of Greenwich-park and Blackheath, of Kennington-common and of Vauxhall, of Richmond, of Kennington, of the parks and the palace vicinities, of Primrose-hill, of Hampstead-heath, of Highgate-hill, of Hackney-fields, of the railway-stations, and of the whole hive of suburban receptacles of both sexes and of every age? The city is then an ocean of life, pouring its living floods in every direction all the afternoon, until the evening, when the tides recede, wave upon wave, till midnight, towards their original fountain. What hosts of ungodly men are here! These innumerable throngs regard the first day of the week as a mere holiday; it never for a moment enters their minds to connect it with its object, the resurrection of the Son of God. We must not lightly pass over the London tea gardens—but who can describe them? The provincial reader can hardly form an estimate of these innumerable synagogues of satan. These haunts carry on their most profitable traffic in the afternoon and evening of the Lord's day. It is a mistake to suppose that the only or chief beverage distributed there, is the juice of the tea leaf. Mr. Twells, when examined before the parliamentary committee on drunkenness, gave his evidence as follows, concerning the White Conduit House, Islington:—"It is difficult to convey an idea of the enormities that are going forward in a house of this kind; occasionally there are 4,000 or 5,000 persons there at a time. I once made it an object of curiosity to go. I am not now clear, but I think there were between 4,000 and 5,000 persons on a Sunday evening—at

that time it was an evening—they were entirely occupied drinking spirits and beer. They called them tea gardens, but I do not suppose you would have found a dozen parties at tea;—they were smoking and drinking, exceedingly respectable as far as their dress went—every part of the house and gardens was crowded to excess." These are the Sabbath schools of iniquity for London youth of both sexes. Schools, alas, everywhere flourishing, and filling the land with adepts in crime, and accomplished contemners of all that is good.

In the absence of piety amongst the bulk of the lower classes, shall we look for morals? If we do, the search will end in disappointment. The first of the virtues, and the foundation of all character, is truth, which is "fallen in the streets,"—and, hence, it is no marvel if "equity cannot enter." Wherever interest or passion is concerned, truth is readily sacrificed, and language is used simply as an instrument for attaining an object. On this point the best teacher is experience, and he who knows most of those classes, will put the least confidence in their testimony. But when truth has fled, her sister, honesty, will never tarry long behind, and theft, accordingly, prevails among them to an awful extent—an extent limited only by opportunities. This vice is more intelligible and calculable than falsehood, and, in some respects, more easily ascertained, The police offices of the metropolis painfully illustrate this point, and indeed the whole question of popular morality. The multitudes of professional thieves that infest the capital, would suffice to people a city of large dimensions; and the total sum of their annual depredations would constitute a princely

revenue. They may be classified according to the time, place, manner, and character of their perpetrations. The ablest writer and most penetrating magistrate, that ever acted in the metropolis, distributes them into twenty-four classes, which, after all, did not comprise "every description of fraud and dishonesty which was practised." * The same magistrate, forty years ago, estimated the amount of depredation on public and private property, committed in the city, and on the river, in one year, at the enormous sum of two millions one hundred thousand pounds sterling! If such was the state of things at that period, what must it be now? It is true, that the system both of the river and city police has been much improved, but both our commerce and population have been prodigiously increased, and crime has increased far beyond both.

The state of things, just mentioned, necessarily implies the existence of other vices, and especially that of drunkenness, which serves the double purpose of preparing for crime, and of afterwards concealing it from conscience. Hence the innumerable low public houses, to which must be added the more splendid erections which adorn or disgrace almost every corner of every street. This is one of the most frightful features of our times, as it respects the lower classes of our city population, and, tried by this test, the most alarming conclusions must be come to, concerning the morals of the metropolis. One circumstance illustrative of the progressive depravation of its morals, deserves especial notice. The magistrate, already quoted, says, "the period is not too remote to be recollected when it was thought a disgrace for a woman (except upon

* Colquhoun.

holiday occasions), to be seen in the tap-room of a public house, but of late years the obloquy has lost its effect, since it is to be lamented that the public tap rooms of many ale houses, are filled with men, women, and children, on all occasions, where the wages of labour is too often exchanged for indulgences ruinous to health, and for lessons of profligacy and vice, totally destructive of the morals of the adults, as well as of the rising generation." This description, which, when first published, bore the aspect of a lamentable discovery, was only the beginning of sorrows—nor is it certain that the calamity has yet reached a climax. The number of places, however, for the sale of distilled spirits, in London, at the present time, exceeds that of the shops of the whole body of the bakers, butchers, and fishmongers, united. Itwould appear as if, by the lower classes, ardent spirits were considered the elixir of life. Multitudes of the most pestiferous houses are the most retired, and the least suspected of fatal influence. The gin palaces are by no means the most fatal, for in them the great proportion of the liquid fire is drunk solitarily over the counter, and the miserable drinkers proceed on ; but in the myriads of smaller receptacles, thousands spend half the day, and tens of thousands most of the night. But many such are not small, for in the east end of London, and along the shore, numbers of public houses have attached to them spacious rooms, capable of containing from one to three hundred persons. Some of these are open at all hours of the night, and crowded by the worst of characters. These are the chief schools of crime. Vagabonds, thieves, and profligates are there reared up in shoals, and thoroughly fitted for the work of

destruction. Kindred establishments, of various magnitude and efficiency, are spread over the whole city, and diffusing their leprous influence through every gradation of society. This vice is the parent fountain of much of the crime, and most of the misery, in London. On this point, shame is no longer the safe-guard of character. "Whole families," says Mr. Chambers, in his evidence before the parliamentary committee on drunkenness, "feel no shame in going into gin shops, who, I am convinced, when I was at first made a police magistrate, would have been ashamed of going into them; and misery has, in consequence, been produced to all the family. Mothers frequently give their children gin, and I have even seen children beaten when they have refused to drink it." Mr. Broughton, a police magistrate, gave his evidence at the above committee, as follows:—"I am sorry to say, that I find a great number of women, and sometimes decent women, that it is shocking to see brought up evidently labouring under the greatest sense of degradation." He also declared his strong belief, that robbery, and the crimes generally, that were committed, and came before him as a magistrate, were greatly increased by the increase of drunkenness. He further maintained, that it is not only persons addicted to drinking that swell the catalogue of crime, but that crime, generally, is "drinking in its remote consequence."

The true state of this dreadful vice, among the lower classes, may be best exemplified by an appeal to the metropolitan police report for one year. From the report exhibited by Mr. Chambers before the above committee, it appears that the charges of drunkenness, and disorders

immediately proceeding from it, amounted, for a single year, to the incredible number 38,440, being more, by 7,321, than one-half of the entire charges brought before the police offices, during the period. Of these 38,440 charges of drunkenness and riot, 21,650 were males, and 16,790 were females! These are facts, on the perusal of which, the Christian reader may turn pale; but they furnish, after all, a very limited view of this fearful sin. Of the multitudes addicted to habits of dissipation, how few, how very few, ever come into the hands of the police! There is another mode of throwing light upon the subject. It appeared in evidence before the committee, that, in one week, there entered into the small number of fourteen of the principal gin shops, 269,437 human beings, viz., 142,453 men, 108,593 women, and 18,391 children. Behold the weekly custom of only fourteen shops!

Drunkenness in London, as a parent vice, is surrounded by a numerous and thriving progeny. Her first-born is impurity,—a vice whose horrid havoc is all but universal. But the soul shrinks from the discussion of this dreadful subject. The pure mind can scarcely approach it; yet it is a chief element of consideration in an attempt to estimate the moral condition of the metropolis. We must, however, satisfy ourselves with the statement of a leading fact. It has been ascertained, with considerable accuracy, that the number of ruined creatures who infest every part of the city, and are, as a retributive scourge, devouring their destroyers, and drawing down to perdition myriads of the metropolitan population, amount to the terrific legion of eighty thousand, of whom no fewer than eight

thousand sink yearly into a premature grave, and, laden with sin, are hurried into an awful eternity! If the revolting heart of the reader will permit his understanding to linger a moment over this fearful sight, let him devote that moment to ask the probable number of the supporters, vassals, and victims of this deadly host! How portentous! What distress, shame, and ruin, to innumerable individuals and families, are indicated by these facts!

The higher classes are but little superior, in respect of morals, to the lower. They but too strikingly illustrate the adage that "extremes meet." They reside principally in the west end of London. Elevated in station, and shrouded in formalities, their characters are less easily examined and estimated than those of the lower ranks. Yet much may be seen and known of them by observers of the middle class. Some, moreover, of the less vicious and more gifted of themselves, have not been sparing of disclosures respecting the minds, manners, and habits of their "order;" and nothing can exceed the deformity of the picture, which their master-hands have drawn of the aristocratic circles. According to these delineators, truth, without which there can be no character, is an unknown virtue amongst them; and, with very many, profligacy, combined with the most heartless and cruel treachery, constitutes the great business of life. They are clothed with iniquity as with a garment. In addition to personal turpitude and social transgression of a more hidden and hideous character, they stand chargeable with the guilt of setting a public example wholly on the side of sin. They clearly exult in their bold contempt of the word and ordinances of the Most High God. If regard to the Lord's-

day be taken as a test, the conclusion is inevitable, that the fear of God is not among them. They especially appropriate that day to the more ostentatious service of the god of this world.

The concentrated rank, power, and wealth of the empire, assembled in the west of London, look like men who have "taken counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The parks, the parlour, the drawing-room, and the club-houses are, on that day, the places of chief resort. "Even cards, music, the song, and the dance, are often the accompaniments to the pleasures of eating and drinking in private Sabbath-day parties."* It is true, the numbers of the higher classes are comparatively limited, yet, absolutely, they are great, and, from their station, wealth, and locomotion, the influence of their character and example is very widely extended. It is unquestionable that, among the glittering throng, there is, in proportion to numbers, as large an amount of guilt and misery as among any portion of the opposite section of society. It is of course acknowledged, with gladness of heart and gratitude to God, that there are a number of honorable exceptions in both sections.

The middle classes of metropolitan society constitute the strength and worth of the capital; the chief supports of its liberty and religion, the great depositaries of its moral truth, commercial honor, and Christian character; the main-stay of the social fabric, and God's chosen instruments to work out the deliverance of the city from

* Great Metropolis.

the thraldom of corruption, and the misery of sin. Among them, too, nevertheless, there is much ignorance and much depravity; but, to the Christian portion of them, we look in behalf of London. On them, under God, must rest both the labour and the honor of ultimately raising the two extremes of their fellow-citizens from the depths of their present moral degradation and spiritual wretchedness.

SECTION II.

OF THE STATE OF RELIGION IN THE METROPOLIS.

We must now turn to metropolitan Christianity, and enquire into the actual condition of things with respect to the religious bodies. This investigation will reveal further reasons for increased exertion on the part of Congregational churches. On this point we must distinguish between church accommodation and church occupancy. The want of accommodation for the masses who ought to attend, is, no doubt, lamentably great, but the want of occupancy of the existing accommodation is also a matter as afflictive as it is undeniable. This view is the more important, inasmuch as it will shew, that an increase of churches and chapels, is not the *only* means necessary to meet the case of London; and it will also go some way to dissipate the delusion which obtains upon the point in the minds of not a few.

The cities of London and Westminster, and the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, the Tower Hamlets, Finsbury, and Marylebone, comprise a population of 1,434,868 persons. In these seven cities and boroughs there are 627 places of worship, of all denominations, which will accommodate 473,961 sitters, a number less, by five or six thousand, than one-third of the whole population; the question, therefore, is,—how much does this fall short of a proper supply? This question must depend upon another:— What amount of sittings may be considered as a proper supply? Various measures have been adopted: one contends, that accommodation for *one-half* the population would be sufficient; another for *five-eighths;* another for *two-thirds;* and, with the latter, we feel constrained, after much consideration and inquiry, to concur. Dr. Chalmers fixes upon the first measure for country parishes, and the second for towns and cities. Mr. Blackburn adopts the first for cities.

Notwithstanding the deference due to gentlemen so thoroughly acquainted with the subject, we must be permitted to insist, that the former is considerably beneath the mark, and the latter still more so; that their standard is formed upon a state of things in which men have "hungered and thirsted" but little "after righteousness." It were easy to shew, that, wherever the word has had free course and been glorified, accommodation has been found necessary for at least two thirds. Moreover the accommodation of cities ought to be rather in advance of the actual necessity, than to lag behind it. On this principle there should be sittings for at least two-thirds of the metropolitan population, or for 956,578 persons.

We, therefore, require to have our city sittings more than doubled, rightly to meet the existing, and to anticipate the hourly-increasing, wants of the population;—to meet the *wants*, not the desires, of the population,—for here lies the fallacy. The existing supply far exceeds the existing desire. Mere church and chapel erections, therefore, are not all, nor even the principal thing, that is essential to meet the case of perishing London. From a good deal that has been both spoken and written of late years, one would imagine that nothing more was necessary to renovate the capital and to save the empire, than that in both town and country, churches should rise in thick succession, with their turrets sparkling in the skies, and their bells chiming in every breeze. Are the multitude, then, clamouring for food to their souls, and weeping for the word of life? Does the demand everywhere outrun the supply? Alas! spiritual famine is accompanied with no sensation of hunger!

The real condition of the metropolis is much more distressing and alarming than it can be made to appear from the statement of the mere deficiency of church and chapel accommodation, as compared with the multitude to be supplied. An honest investigation of the subject of actual occupancy will reveal secrets which good men would rather not hear. Of the 473,961* sittings already provided by all denominations, how many are—we will not say let, but—occupied? Can we, dare we, say more than one half? Some have calculated three-fifths, but a

* See a very able and elaborate paper, entitled, "Analytical and Historical Notices of Church Accommodation in the Metropolis," in the Congregational Magazine, for January, 1839.

close and careful examination will reduce it another fraction. Taking the 627 existing places of worship together, will any practical man ask or grant more than an average congregation of 400 persons to each of them? We are well aware that there is no point on which the bulk of the people, and even men of intelligence, err so egregiously, as on this. Want of reflection, or vanity, or inexperience, or all the three, have often led to most preposterous estimates on the subject, even to the extent of doubling or trebling the real capacity of places.* Such people will wonder, and oppose our view; but we appeal to men who are guided by arithmetic, not imagination, confident that they will consider our estimate to be rather above than below the truth.

Descending from general views to particular facts, we would state, that of the city established churches, a large proportion are rendered all but useless by their situation. The ancient city is greatly abandoned as a residence, and appropriated to commerce. The hives of humanity are now the boroughs and suburban districts. "North and south of Cornhill, within the superficial space of *one-sixteenth* part of a mile, there are *fourteen* churches standing and in use. Again, north and south of Old Fish-street

* The extent to which not only a man of ability, but of keen observation and very inquisitive habits, may be led away on this subject, is remarkably exemplified in the following passage from "Travels in Town." "Speaking of the largest number of persons I have seen at one time in a place of worship, I must not omit to mention that in Mr. Fletcher's chapel I have seen every Christmas morning, for the last five years, 5000 children, and from 2500 to 3000 adults, making 7500 to 8000 persons altogether."—Vol. ii. p. 193. The full measured capacity of this chapel is 2200 only.—See "Ecclesiastical Statistics of London."—*Congregational Magazine*, June, 1838, p. 330.

there are *seven* churches within an area of not more than one-fourth of the former space, *three* of which *stand* within a hundred yards of each other, and the site of the fourth lies in the midst of them."* Were the whole population of these districts churchmen, they might be all fully accommodated, and eighteen churches would be to spare! In a word, it is notorious that, of the seventy-five churches in the city of London, few, if any, have a congregation even approaching to respectability in numbers. But for their endowments they must be speedily shut up. Their situation, then, is almost equivalent to their demolition, which, while it would prodigiously diminish the numerical amount of sittings, would take very little away from the available existing accommodation.

The Episcopalian edifices, taken as a whole, have not the numbers we have assigned them, viz. 400 each. Then, taking Dissenters of every class, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact, that a large proportion of their chapels are but poorly attended; and that, taken as a whole, they are greatly under 500 each; so that, the Church and Dissenting places, united, will do little if anything more than sustain the numbers we have assigned them. Granting, then, that this measure is, upon the whole, correct, the result will be an average of 250,800† regular hearers out of one

* Congregational Magazine, January, 1839.

† Since the above was written, a paper on the "Religious Destitution of the Metropolis," has appeared in the *Evangelical Magazine* for May, in which the writer calculates that the numbers attending public worship, at any one time, are 252,570. This close coincidence has gratified, though not confirmed us, for our minds had been brought under an irresistible and unalterable conviction of the substantial correctness of our conclusion. The author of the paper aforesaid has, however, fallen into a considerable error regarding the number of places of worship, which he gives as 660,

million four hundred and thirty-four thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight persons! Behold the contrast! The causes of sorrow and pain do not end with the limited number of auditors. It must also be ascertained who they are, and what is addressed to them. Now let it be remembered, that of these 473,961 sittings, upwards of 20,000 belong to Jews, Papists, Quakers, and Socinians. Then what is regularly taught in a large proportion of the Episcopalian churches? Alas! every thing is taught but the truth as it is in Jesus.

Of the above 250,800 hearers, in all denominations, how many are *communicants?* Can the Dissenters, at the utmost, claim more than one fourth? Will the Episcopalians prove that they have more than a tenth? Whatever be the claims or proofs of either or of both, these fractions will be found to come very near the truth. Assuming, then, what cannot, however, be granted, that the Episcopalians and Nonconformists have equal average numbers of hearers, according to the numbers of their edifices, respectively, that is, 400 to each,—which is giving the former a great advantage,—the matter will then stand thus: Nonconformist edifices, 372,—hearers, 148,800,—communicants, 37,200; Episcopalian edifices, 255,—hearers, 102,000,—communicants, 10,200:—total number of communicants, 47,400. This gives a result of exactly 100 communicants to each of the Nonconformist

whereas the correct return, as furnished by the *Congregational Magazine* for January, is 627. This error, however, serves to show that the author of the paper fixes a smaller average congregation for each place of worship than we have done. His number, with our average, would have given him a total of 264,000 attendants,—a further corroboration of our estimate.

places; and 40 communicants to each of the churches and chapels of the establishment,—a number which the true returns on the subject will hardly sustain, certainly not exceed.* How lamentable a state of things! Only about a *sixth part* of the entire population are in the habit of attending public worship! The houses of prayer, in this great metropolis, are only six hundred and twenty-seven, and the houses for the sale of strong drink number almost six thousand! Many of these have been and are the sources of ample fortunes to their possessors; while their position, magnitude, and peerless splendour, indicate that, of all vocations, the most thriving is that which inevitably tends to the extinction of intellect, the ruin of morals, the desolation of families, the overthrow of the country, and the eternal destruction of the souls of men!

Will any Christian, as a pretext for perseverance in guilty negligence, affect to view these calculations as an extravagant aggravation of the lamentable condition of the city? Will they softly distribute an abundance of devout and charitable hopes, that matters are not quite so bad, and slumber on, while the pestilence and the havoc are spreading on every hand, and the dread gulph is deepening and widening every hour? Humanity, patriotism, religion, forbid it!

Congregational churches of the metropolis! Are these

* If any suppose that the estimate of Episcopalian communicants is low, let them visit the bulk of the city churches on a communion day; or let them turn to the third section of this chapter, and ponder the evidence of the Bishops of Chester and Winchester, and they will find that the church, instead of being injured, owes something to our bounty. Even in the diocese of Winchester, it rarely exceeds our estimate, "and in the great majority of instances the proportion is still smaller." What, then, must the state of things be in this great, corrupt, and benighted capital?

things so? Is such the spiritual and moral state of the great majority of your fellow citizens? How long shall it be thus with the myriads of London, the city of Bibles and missions, of manifold and multiform benevolence? Are they not your neighbours, and your brethren? Have they not the *first* claim upon your tender compassion? Is it not most preposterous to weep over the perdition of distant millions, and set at nought the claims of countless multitudes who are dropping into hell all around you, at your doors, and before your eyes? Only think of your responsibility! It is unutterable! Here is the Bible Society, with her hundred tongues, rearing her glorious head, and speaking to the nations, islands, and empires, of every sky, in their own language, the wonderful works of God:—here is all the concentrated missionary spirit of the three kingdoms, melting with pity, and burning with zeal to save the nations of other climes:—here is the chosen abode of Christian mercy, in all her loveliest forms of exhibition or operation; and, Oh! here, amid all this mighty array of agents and instruments of spiritual life, is a city full of dead men!

Congregational churches of the metropolis! How long shall it be ere you fully awake to your duty, and to the claims of these myriads of dying souls? Surely it is time for you to unite in one solemn league and covenant to labour, as for life, to pour the waters of salvation, in a flowing tide, over the entire length and breadth of your plague-struck and perishing city. Surely you will hasten to embark in every enterprise which has this for its object. Surely not one pastor or one church in the capital will, unless hindered by temporary obstructions, allow another

year to pass, without most cordially enlisting in the ranks of the "Metropolis Chapel Fund Association," an Institution whose claims are absolutely paramount, and which, if taken up as it ought to be, by the city Congregational churches, might annually increase your chapels by the number of, at least, a dozen or a score. But chapels, we repeat and insist, are not the only thing which pressingly demands your solemn and immediate attention. Personal agency, of a proper description, must be augmented tenfold. To both these objects, up to the measure here specified, you are, in all respects, perfectly equal, if properly influenced by conviction of duty, and suitably organized. And has not a case of necessity, sufficiently pressing, now been made out? Well, if so, then, "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven."—Ezra vii. 23.

SECTION III.

OF THE STATE OF MORALS AND RELIGION IN THE PROVINCES.

Passing from the capital to the provinces of England, we are presented with two classes, the agricultural and the manufacturing population. The relative numbers of these have been very much changed within the last thirty years;

a circumstance which ought for the future materially to guide the movements of the Congregational body. As compared with the labourers in agriculture, the manufacturers and workmen resident in towns, in England and Wales, were in 1801, six to five, giving the trades-people only a majority of one; in 1811, they were as nine to seven; in 1821, as eight to five; and in 1838, they are considered to have increased in the same proportion to fully two to one, or double. In the space of thirty years the increase in the agricultural population had been forty-five per cent., while the manufacturing classes had increased upwards of one hundred per cent. The gradation is strikingly exemplified in the larger towns, where the increase has been as follows:—In Manchester, from 1801 to 1811, the increase was twenty-two per cent.; from 1811 to 1821, forty per cent.; and from 1821 to 1831, forty-seven per cent. In Birmingham, during the same periods, the increase was sixteen, twenty-four, and thirty-three per cent. In Leeds the increase was eighteen, thirty-four, and forty-seven per cent. In Liverpool the increase was twenty-six, thirty-one, and forty-three per cent. The general result is, that, within the last ten years of the series, the population of the commercial and manufacturing towns have increased at three times the rate of the increase of the whole kingdom, and four times that of the agricultural parts. The principle contained in these facts should have been the polar star of the provincial Independent churches, which ought to have been rapidly multiplied in all the great towns and cities. This, however, has not been done to the extent which was necessary. The harvest in all its expanse has been before them, but

they have sparingly put in the sickle. Many towns might be mentioned in England and Scotland, where Congregational churches ought to have been doubled, trebled, or quadrupled by this time. Such, however, has been the apathy of Independents, that in most cases there has been little increase of number; and that which has occurred has resulted less frequently from holy zeal than from strife and division. There have not been wanting noble instances of individual zeal and liberality, which God has crowned with great success, but the churches, as a whole, have neglected their duty. In this point, which is one of considerable delicacy, pastors must lead the way; and thus to act requires equally, courage, confidence in God, and nobility of mind. But in such cases, well and wisely conducted, ministers themselves will be ultimately benefited, as well as the cause of truth. In many places where one church is languishing, two or three might have flourished; and in many instances where one church has been torn with strife, sister fellowships would have been ready to receive such as had become uncomfortable, and whose timely departure would have preserved peace. At the present hour the Rev. Dr. Russell, of Dundee, and Mr. Parsons, of York, are setting a noble and generous example, each, by the erection of a second chapel in these towns, respectively.

The state of morals among these numerous tribes of men, will assist in determining to what extent the provincial churches have done their duty, as well as shew the measure of necessity which now exists for increased exertion. An appeal must, therefore, be made to the criminal records of the country. The number of criminals committed in England and Wales, in the year 1805, was

4,600; in 1810, 5,100; in 1815, 7,800; in 1821, 13,000; in 1828, 16,500; in 1831, 19,600; and in 1832, 20,000; and the increase has gone on, with small abatement, until the present hour. Mankind were unprepared for this result, and some may suppose that the increase is to be accounted for by the growth of the population. Would that such were the fact! The truth is, that within the brief space of twenty-two years, that is, from 1810 to 1832, the number of committals increased *four-fold*, while the population increased only thirty-two per cent. Or, take another view, let the average of three periods, of seven years each, be fixed upon, say 1819, 1826, and 1833—the committals of the first period were 72,000; of the second, 95,000; and of the third, 131,000—so that, while the population had increased in the same periods only eighteen per cent., the committals for crime had increased ninety per cent. Or take yet another view; take the number of committals, as compared with the population, during periods of ten years asunder; it will then appear that committals for crime, in 1811, were one in 1,600 of the population; in 1821, they were one in 860; and in 1831, they were one in 686. The expense of gaols, prisoners' food, prosecutions, and constables, in 1792, was £172,359; in 1832, the expense was £487,000—thus the expense of crime was trebled in forty years, while the population only increased sixty per cent.

Surely this is a most terrific record; but it is unhappily supported by other modifications of evil and immorality. Drunkenness, a chief ingredient in the analysis of crime, has walked in harmony with the progress of public committals for transgression. Three periods will illustrate

the progression.--In 1817, 9,200,000 gallons of spirits were consumed in Great Britain; in 1827, 18,230,000 gallons were used; and in 1837, 29,227,000 gallons were drunk—thus trebling the consumption of spirits in twenty years! The population, meanwhile, increased only one-third; the result, therefore is, that the consumption of spirits increased, during that period, in a nine-fold degree with respect to the population. It must be remembered, too, that spirits are chiefly consumed by the lower classes resident in large towns. Drunkenness is the infallible index to crime; so that with the increase of the one, we may predict with certainty the increase of the other.

Such is the dark and dreary moral aspect of England and Wales, so far as indicated by these various facts. Are our prospects brighter for the generation to come? The facts which follow may aid us in the solution of this question, provided that a good Christian education be considered an element either in the prevention or cure of crime. In the large manufacturing towns the proportion of children between the ages of five years and fifteen, is twenty-five per cent., or one-fourth of the whole population.—Hence one in four ought to be always at school. The true state of the case stands nearly thus in the chief towns; and it is a fair sample of all England;—In York, one in six attends daily instruction; in Bury, one in seven and a half; in Manchester, one in nine and a half; in Liverpool, one in eight; in Bolton, one in sixteen; in Bristol, one in twenty-four; in Duckenfield, Staley-bridge, and Ashton, one in forty-six. Such in those places respectively, is the ratio of day-school education, good and bad. We stop not to inquire into the moral or religious tendencies of

that which is imparted in such lamentably defective proportions; for, granting it to be what it unhappily is not, still the want to be supplied is so great as to excite the utmost anxiety among all reflecting men. Of that want an idea may he formed from Mr. Horner's report on the state of the factories. It appeared from an examination of the children of the ages of thirteen and fourteen, and who were consequently above the operation of the education clauses of the Factory Act, that of the boys, forty-nine and a half per cent. could not read, and sixty-seven per cent. could not write their names;—of the girls, fifty-seven per cent. could not read, and eighty-eight per cent. could not write their names. As a general result, it appeared that half the children of all the manufacturing towns had no means of obtaining education; and it is clear beyond all fair contradiction that THREE-FOURTHS of the poorer children throughout all the great towns of the land, are without any effective moral or intellectual training. * The merits and operation of Sunday-schools will be subsequently considered.

We now proceed to take a more spiritual view of the condition of the provinces; and on this subject we are happily supplied with testimony of the most unquestionable character. The subject divides itself into two parts; first, the amount of external attendance on the means of grace, and secondly the measure of efficacy accompanying those means.

1st. The amount of external attendance is as unsatis-

* See Mr. Slaney's speech in the House of Commons, Nov. 30, 1837; Reports by the Statistical Societies of Manchester and London; and also the Papers of the British Association at Bristol and Liverpool.

factory as can well be conceived. No person, probably, is a better judge, or a more competent witness on this point than the Bishop of Chester,—a man who, by his literary labours, has deserved well of his country, and of the whole Christian world—a man equally admired for his practical wisdom, and esteemed for his Christian virtues by all the Dissenters of England,—and most thoroughly acquainted with his subject. This prelate thus writes: —"There are many who imagine that if the people are not in the Established churches they are in the Dissenting chapels, and are, therefore, not destitute of religious instruction. The truth is not so. The country may be assured, and ought to be informed, that the case is otherwise. The mass of the ADULT manufacturing population is, in point of fact, without religious instruction of any kind." * The testimony of Bishop Sumner is most appropriately followed by that of the Pastoral Aid Society, of which his lordship is a patron and prime promoter. Great value attaches to the statistical information procured by this society, whose benevolent and laudable exertions spread over such an extent of spots and parishes as to comprise an aggregate population of 1,000,000 souls and upwards. One clerical applicant states, that in his district, it is a common occurrence to meet with aged couples living together unmarried; and that "the cases in which children, now grown up, were neglected to be brought to the baptismal font, are innumerable." † Another applicant in Lancashire, thus writes to the committee:—"I have lately been appointed to a large chapel, purchased from the Dissenters, and am surrounded by a population,

* Second Charge. † Occasional Paper, iv.

almost exclusively poor, of not less than 30,000, grossly ignorant, and frightfully immoral." * A Yorkshire vicar says :—" It is my melancholy duty to state, that the average attendance at the parish church, out of so considerable a population, does not exceed twelve individuals. The attendance at the Methodist chapels is of a character equally unsatisfactory. A sense of religious responsibility is almost altogether vanished from the place, and the inhabitants, with the exception of a few, but very few, respectable individuals, have no fear of Almighty God before their eyes." † Another clergyman, labouring amid a population of about 10,000, or 11,000, reports, that the lower orders of the people are for the most part uneducated, drunken, and immoral." ‡ The minister of a large manufacturing town, with a population of about 20,000 inhabitants, writes, that he visited personally 2,281 families, comprising a population of 9,550 souls, concerning whom he says:—" Of the 9,550, only 3,053, less than one-third, can read; and only 1,581 families, or little more than one-half, have the scriptures; of 4,000 children, under fifteen years, only 1,734, little more than one-third, attend a Sunday-school; and only 580, about one-seventh, a day-school. In one division of the district, there are 10,000 inhabitants without a church, chapel, or school. The district contains eighty-eight public houses, thirty-two inns, and fixty-six beer-shops." Another zealous parochial minister, with a population of 14,000, or 15,000 souls, reports that "a vast number of desperately wicked and profligate people regularly congregate together on the Lord's day, to read infidel publications, and who make no

* Occasional Paper, iv. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid. iv; ibid. ii.

secret in publicly and privately declaring, on all occasions, that they disbelieve the existence of God, and of course deny a future state."*

The above testimonies may be taken as a fair sample of the too general condition of the whole country, even in the estimation of candid Churchmen, who cannot be suspected of exaggerations, and that after centuries of privilege, endowment, and state alliance, and comparative freedom from the "disturbing" influence of "irregular teachers." Is this all the proof that can be given of "the might and the mastery" of the *endowed* system? If so, and if the Voluntary system be what certain parties represent it, is it not time for all that fear God and love their country, to ask what is further to be done? If the Compulsory scheme has so lamentably failed, and the Voluntary plan be utterly impotent, how is the nation to be enlightened and the world saved?

A portion of auxiliary testimony may now be admitted from a body of candid, moderate, Christian men, who, while they adhere to principle, are superior to party; and who, in their Apostolic labours, are of no sect. We refer to the directors of the Home Missionary Society, who possess a more complete knowledge of the spiritual state of the English counties, taken as a whole, than any other like number of men in the nation. To them, indeed, belongs the high honour of having led the way in this most important species of statistical inquiry. Their primary statements relative to the moral and religious destitution of the land, were, by one party, flatly contradicted; they were by another, suspected of exaggeration; and

* Occasional Paper, i.

they were received with hesitating caution by the great body of British Christians. Subsequent inquiries, however, have dissipated the delusion, and produced a painful unity of conviction in the minds of candid men of all denominations. It is now found, that all their mistakes were on the side of understatement. It may suffice to take their evidence, as given in their report of 1834, where they thus deliver themselves:—"After all the numerical strength that either of the great conflicting parties have been enabled to muster up, we have still left nearly *five millions* of our population, who either do not attend the means of grace, or are unsupplied with them." To this dreadful declaration it is surely unnecessary to add another tittle of evidence. If that already given be defective, what is sufficient? All this, however, bears only upon the point of general depravity, and external attendance on the means of salvation; but there is another view of the subject.

2nd. We must now inquire into the measure of efficiency resulting from these means. Here again the very first authority is their lordships, the evangelical bishops, whose parochial returns from their immense body of clergy, bring the condition of millions before them in the most condensed and intelligible shape. On these returns, the opinions of their lordships are founded. The only danger, from what we know of human nature, is, that the returns, in many instances, may be over rather than under the fact. From various causes it can hardly be doubted that such is the case—honestly the case—with many of the gentlemen by whom the returns were made. The statements of the bishops are based upon these returns; and

the diocesan of Chester, in addressing his clergy, thus speaks: "One single criterion, even if it stood alone, that of the Lord's table, must oblige us to consider a great part of all our congregations as essentially deficient either in Christian knowledge, or Christian feeling. How small a portion of those congregations are communicants, you are yourselves aware; and though many may communicate with little sincerity, and, therefore, as a positive test of Christian faith, we cannot absolutely receive it; yet as a negative test, I fear that it is too sure, and that very few really scruple to communicate, who, remaining as they are, any thinking person would wish to see communicants. We may charitably believe that they are kept back by erroneous views, or superstitious fears; but I am strongly of opinion, that few are really withheld, except by the apathy of gross ignorance, or the consciousness of allowed sin."* "By the returns of population in 1821 it appears, that of every hundred persons, twenty are under seven years of age; twenty are between the ages of seven and fifteen; ten between fifteen and twenty; leaving fifty from the age of twenty upwards. More than half, therefore, of our people ought to be habitual communicants, before we have any just grounds to be satisfied with their state. I shall not detail the awfully different result, which has been furnished me from the several parishes, because each clergyman can calculate it for himself; but I am sure that the fact justifies any strength of language that I can use, and demands any measure of zealous exertion that the clergy can devise, in order that they may introduce a state of things more resembling a

* Primary Charge, p. 18.

community of Christians."* It is greatly to be wished that his lordship had given us the arithmetic of the question, since, on various grounds, the fact is full of interest and of instruction. His eminent relative, the bishop of Winchester, however, has with propriety and justice, brought it boldly forward; and there is reason to believe that their returns substantially agree. At his primary visitation, he thus addressed his clergy:—"The sacrament of the Lord's supper calls for the discharge of functions often not less difficult and delicate. I observe by the returns, that the communicants in this diocese very rarely exceed one-tenth part of the congregation; and in the *great majority of instances the proportion is still smaller.* This suggests a fearful consideration. 'Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?' What judgment is the minister to form of that part of his charge, who live in the habitual neglect of this ordinance? What hope can he entertain of being able to render up his account of them with joy?"† Last, not least, is the evidence of the bishop of Lichfield, who, addressing his clergy, with his characteristic manhood and fidelity, sets forth in a true and worthy manner, the real state of his See, notwithstanding its humbling and mortifying character. This mighty diocese contains one million sixty-five thousand and ninety souls, whose condition, in so far as the Establishment is concerned, may be comprehended, when it is stated, that the attendance at the parish churches does not fill much more than one-third the capacity of the buildings. His own words, when speaking of the attendance, are these:—"Its average bears the

* Primary Charge, Appendix i. † Ibid. p. 42.

proportion of not much more than one-third to the capacity; and of the saving and permanent nature of the impression made by that attendance, perhaps, the number of communicants may exhibit a more trying criterion and testimony. Hardly one-fourth of those who do attend, and, therefore, one-twelfth of those who might attend, give even that external evidence and pledge of faith, and repentance, and devotedness to their divine Lord and Master; a grievous disproportion, surely, even after a proper allowance for persons under age. These calculations form, my reverend brethren, a subject of deep and painful consideration for us who are to watch for souls as those who must give account."* This may suffice for mitred evidence. What shall be said of it? These three prelates alone have under them no small portion of the entire population of England. Their informants, we repeat, and let it not be forgotten, are a host, many of them men of exalted piety, and possessing the best possible means of knowledge—actual experience,—and such is the united testimony of both clergy and bishops.

Are these the grounds on which we denominate England a Christian country? There is yet, however, one more witness, whom we cannot withhold, since no living Englishman is more thoroughly acquainted with the entire working of the Establishment, and the actual religious state of the nation, than the editor of the "Christian Observer,"—a man and a work that, take them for all in all, have strong claims to the respect and gratitude of their age and country, for the service they have rendered

* Third Charge, 1832.

to religion and humanity, throughout the earth. The "Observer's" evidence runs thus:—"We do not inquire whether most of the people, in our city and country parishes, attend the sacrament; for their too common ignorance of the very first principles of true religion, their inattention to the Bible and books of devotion, calculated to benefit their souls, and the want of ecclesiastical discipline, for the purpose of excluding public offenders, and re-admitting penitents, does not even render it desirable, that, as a body, they should, in their present state of ignorance and irreligion, come to the Lord's supper."* How dreadful is this description of "*most* of the people in our city and country parishes!" Behold, again, the state of England, after centuries of the enjoyment of an "Apostolic church, with bishops, priests, and deacons," allied to the state, and sustained by more than regal revenues!

Congregational churches of the provinces of England, come near; behold your native land! See its desolations! Your bleeding country looks to you, with your Dissenting and Voluntary brethren of other denominations, for help in her extremity. In the hands of those who have received hundreds of millions to "heal" her, she hath obtained no effectual cure! It is clear that, under their unassisted care, her "bruise is incurable, and her wound is grievous." They have no adequate supply of "healing medicines;" they are equally deficient in practical skill;† and generations, we fear, must pass away be-

* Christian Observer, April, 1828.

† The most precious part of the Non-conformist system is the provision which it makes for a pious pastorship. The lamentable, the dreadful, state of things, with respect to this cardinal matter, in the Esta-

fore the arrival of a real, a thorough, a scriptural reformation. We plead her cause with you, therefore, and with your brethren, who *have* "ecclesiastical discipline," who *can* both "exclude" and "re-admit," as conscience, the character of parties, and the command of Christ may require; who have in all your pulpits the pure Gospel of salvation; and whose system provides for a supply of men to proclaim it, who have had experience of its power. Is there, or is their not, a case made out of necessity for "increased Home Missionary and other similar efforts" throughout your teeming districts? If these facts have failed, we again ask—how is it possible to succeed, in the establishment of such a case? But the facts have not failed. It is impossible! You see their truth; you feel their force; you are hastening to meet the

blishment, greatly abates the pleasure, which, other considerations apart, we should feel on beholding in all directions the rise of so many Episcopalian places of worship. There is, in most cases, however, no guarantee even that the primary appointment shall be a proper one, and, if less be possible, still less, for successive appointments. The following passage from the pen of an able Episcopalian writer, may tend to open the eyes of some among ourselves who exercise their charity at the expense of their judgment, who are largely endowed with the grace of hope without a "promise," or any evidence on which to rest it, and who have encouraged the secession of their children to the Establishment, in the anticipation of better things within her pale:—

"In our church thousands of boys are educated for the priest's office for a morsel of bread. All our grammar schools, scholarships, fellowships; the sale, purchase, and pecuniary value of presentations, and advowsons; the permission of pluralities; the bait of too large livings, and splendid dignities;—all tend to force into the church a majority,—I say, advisedly, a majority—of clergymen not supremely attached to the office. The remedy for all this is obvious; but it is, I fear, too sweeping, too 'revolutionary,' too much opposed to the whole existing corrupt system of patronage, private interest, academic prejudice, secular partizanship, and church-mongering, to allow any hope of its speedy adoption."—*Christian Observer*, May, 1831.

necessity. Ye men of God in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham, and other great towns, we look most earnestly to you! The position assigned you by Providence comprehends manifold privileges, and imposes corresponding duties. Move, yourselves, in this mighty enterprise, and do your utmost to put in motion all around you! A number of you have done much; we glorify God in you, and pray that you may abound, yet more and more, and go on provoking one another to love and to good works.

SECTION IV.

OF THE STATE OF MORALS AND RELIGION IN SCOTLAND.

The state of crime in Scotland must not be taken as an index of the true state of piety. In that country we must ground our plea for necessity upon other reasons than the existence of the more atrocious kinds of crime. The stupendous force with which the principles of the Reformation were brought to bear upon almost the entire country, in the days of Knox and his great coadjutors, is not yet fully spent; of that force and its omnipotent effects, some judgment may be formed from the following statement of the venerable historian of her Church. When speaking of the period that intervened between 1638, and the restoration of Charles II., he says,—"At the King's

return every parish had a minister, every village had a school, every family almost had a Bible; yea, in almost all the country, every child could read the Scriptures, and were provided with Bibles, either by their parents or their ministers. * * * I have lived many years in a parish where I never heard an oath, and you might have ridden many miles before you heard one; also you could not, in a great part of the country, have lodged in a family, where the Lord was not worshipped by reading, singing, and public prayer."* So thorough and complete was the work of Reformation in Scotland,—sixty-seven years after the departure of the immortal Knox! It will subsequently appear, that this glorious result was, in great part, the fruit of the labours of laymen. The Reformed church in Scotland was the subject of great vicissitudes, in after times. But, over all the land, the forms of piety survived the slow decay of its power, and these forms have, to no small extent, proved the bulwark of the nation's morals.

It is most instructive to compare the moral effects of the Reformation in England and Scotland, at the present period, as these effects are indicated by the proportionate state of crime. A general view is exhibited in the following table:—

	Population.	Convictions.	Petty Offences.	Capital Offences.	Executions.
England . .	13,897,187	14,771	8,925	494	17
Scotland .	2,365,114	2,223	2,152	2	1

The facts, here brought to light, lead to conclusions exceedingly important. The gross population in each of

* Kirkton's History of the Church of Scotland, p. 64.

the two nations, may be estimated in round numbers at fourteen millions, and two and a half millions; or, to get rid of the fraction, take England at twenty-eight half millions, and Scotland at five half millions; thence the following table may be constructed:—

	Population in half Millions.	Ratio of Convictions, one to every	Proportion of Petty Offences to Convictions.	Ratio of Capital Offences, one to every
England ..	28	942	3 to 5	28,340
Scotland ..	5	1,063	1 to 1	1,125,000*

The difference set forth in these two tables is very extraordinary; in England, there is one capital offender in every 28,340 persons; in Scotland, there is only one capital offender in every 1,125,000 persons. This comparative nullity of capital convictions and executions unquestionably evinces a high degree of moral feeling in the great body of the people of Scotland. From this very circumstance, it is that the danger of the country arises. Cold morality is mistaken by multitudes for religion; they have the form of godliness, but they deny its power. Wesley, with his characteristic penetration, admirably hit off the national character, when he said,—"The Scotch are certainly the best hearers in Europe—they hear every thing; they understand every thing; they feel nothing." It, however, behoves all concerned, to remember that morality will not always, nor long, survive the decay of piety. The condition of Scotland is, at this moment, fearful, especially in the commercial districts, great towns, and cities. The recent sifting of the ecclesiastial commissioners has brought to light hidden things of vast mo-

* Monthly Chronicle, December, 1838.

ment. It has been discovered that in Glasgow, its largest city, there are 60,000 persons who attend no place of worship, and in Edinburgh, its capital, there are 40,000 in the same condition; in both cases, these heathenish multitudes form no slight proportion of the entire population. Perhaps, it may be thought, especially from the cry and the conflict about church extension, that there is a fatal want of church and chapel accommodation; but the fact is, that there are unlet sittings, 21,000 in the one city just mentioned, and 19,600 in the other.

To these facts, we shall now add the evidence of two competent witnesses, both eminent men, and intimately conversant with the subject in hand. The late Rev. Dr. Hamilton, of Strathblane, almost with his dying hand, thus recorded his opinion:—"Protestant Britain is still the abode of profligacy and vice, and forms a part of that world which lieth in wickedness. The greater part of the inhabitants neither know God, nor obey the gospel of his Son. Myriads cannot read the word of God, and multitudes, who occasionally peruse it, neither understand, nor wish to comprehend what it contains."* Then follows Dr. Chalmers, in himself a host, who thus declares his view, after the unexampled study and enlarged experience of a life time:—"The truth is, that, in our large cities, and more especially in their suburbs, as well as in those manufacturing districts, which so teem with recent villages, and where every establishment has its cluster of families, it may, with all safety, be affirmed, that greatly more than *one-half* of sufficient age for church going, attend no where; and that they neither own nor occupy

* Life and Remains, vol. II. p. 16.

seats in any place of worship whatever."* What Dr. Chalmers affirms of villages, towns, and cities, may, with equal truth be asserted of the greater part of the Scottish nation. The inhabitants of the Highlands and islands, comprising about a sixth part of the whole population, are to a large extent in a state of great spiritual destitution, and chiefly dependent for their summer supplies of the bread of life, on the itinerant exertions of the Congregational body, and of other denominations.† Nor is this all; the extended shires of Stirling, Perth, Angus,

* Chalmers on Endowments, p. 112.

† The state of matters, up to the present hour, is painfully exemplified by a letter from a parochial clergyman of the Scotch Establishment, resident in the West Highlands, dated March 10, 1839, and published in the "Scottish Pilot." The following is an extract:—

"The lower classes here are deplorably wicked. I do not believe that one-tenth of them go to any place of worship, except when the sacrament of the supper is dispensed in the parish church, that is once a year,—they had better not be there then, either,—the profanation of that ordinance is fearful. It is like a public market; indeed, there is as much drinking and dissipation on these occasions, in this part of the country, as at a public fair in Fife. Were it not for the exertions of Dissenters (few though these Dissenters be, and despised and ridiculed as they are by your High Church party,) the Highlands would at this moment be in a condition worse than the heathen were,--of course, I speak generally,—there are honourable exceptions in some localities; but to hear in the Lowlands the cry of the Kirk party, 'what would become of the Highlands, were it not for the Establishment,?' one would almost think that there must be something good in the system after all, in certain circumstances. Let any unprejudiced person, however, come upon the spot, and look at the state of matters in the Highlands and Islands, and he will come to a very different conclusion. True, indeed, the Voluntary system has not yet been able to do a great deal for these parts, but when the difficulties that lie in the way are taken into consideration, it is wonderful they have been able to do so much. The Independents and Baptists have had to encounter much in doing what they have done. I am sometimes astonished that they persevere, after what they have in some cases to endure in the prosecution of their labours. There is an island in my view where there are 1,600 inhabitants; the island is twelve miles long; there is no mi-

Forfar, and Aberdeen, with occasional exceptions, are but "dry and thirsty lands," in so far as the Established church is concerned, and owe nearly their all to the ministrations of the Presbyterian Dissenters, and the itinerant or stationary efforts of the Independents and others. The whole of the Southern counties are, if worse be possible, in a still worse condition.

Scottish Congregational churches! you know and believe that there exists a "pressing necessity at this period for increased Home Missionary and other similar efforts" by you. This is almost the only species of labour that can at present meet the wants of your thinly-peopled regions. By this means only can the great bulk of your rural countrymen be speedily, contemporaneously, and efficiently addressed. Your attention has been full forty years directed to the subject; great has been your exertion to promote your country's good, and, under the Divine blessing, corresponding has been the benefit resulting from that exertion. What strange events the elder members of your body have lived to see! What a revolution you have witnessed in the views of a vast portion of the most

nister resident in it; it only forms part of a parish sixty miles long, and the minister preaches in the island once in two or three weeks. Yet, I believe, that so much ground could not be got upon it as would be necessary for building a dissenting place of worship. It is true, the Voluntary churches want suitable labourers for the Highlands, but the door is shut against them; they may itinerate, but form churches they dare not; the clergy and the lairds join their influence to keep them out. I trust the the day is coming when things will assume a different aspect in this part of the country, and when Dissenters will take active and decided steps to raise the inhabitants from their present state of ignorance and sin. The Establishment is not doing this, nor will it do it so long as Dissenters are kept out. I am freely convinced of this from what I see and what I hear from others who have better opportunities of knowing the state of the country. May the Lord raise up suitable labourers, and bless them in their work."

enlightened and religious of your countrymen on the subject of ecclesiastical polity! How full of encouragement is your history and example to the suffering friends of truth in every clime! For many a long year had you to stem the torrent of adversity, without succour and without sympathy. The Church of Scotland and all the sectaries were leagued against you. Your name was a reproach and a bye-word. You were denounced both from the pulpit and from the press, as a people involved in error, entertaining views and promoting practices adverse to the religious and political interests of your country. But of all the errors charged upon you, none were deemed more monstrous or mischievous than the idea which you entertained and propagated respecting the spiritual state of your native land, and the propriety and duty of employing lay agency to supply its necessities. But lo, it hath come to pass, that the venerable Ewing, Innes, Haldane, and other patriarchs of your denomination, have lived to see the general concession of their views on these high points, and the extensive spread and incipient triumph of all their great and distinguishing principles. Nor is this all: they have even beheld their honoured Wardlaw summoned to do battle on the great question of Religious Establishments, with the far-famed Scottish champion of church-and-state alliance, in the capital of England! Thus at length the Lord hath lifted up your head; He hath turned your captivity as streams in the south, and you are as men that dream. By the good hand of your God upon you, much has been accomplished; but your principal laurels are yet to be reaped; your chief victories still remain to be achieved. Go on and prosper!

SECTION V.

OF THE STATE OF MORALS AND RELIGION IN IRELAND.

UNHAPPY Ireland! Who can depict either her morals or her dominant religion? What is her name but another term for spiritual destitution? Does not the simple mention of it wake up thoughts only of ignorance, crime, and wretchedness? While thick and general darkness broods over her, misery, as a mantle, clothes her millions of degraded population. Her distress has, for centuries, supplied a theme for poets, historians, orators, and statesmen. About her condition there is little dispute, whatever contention there may be with respect to its causes. We, as Christians and freemen, have our own views on the point. Of her Popish provinces, we consider it altogether needless to utter a single word. We direct our remarks, therefore, to such as are Protestant, more especially to the north and north-eastern counties of Ulster, where the banner of Protestantism hath long waved, but where there is still much spiritual darkness, much spiritual death,—where the exceptions are only as spectres stalking in midnight solitude, adding to the appalling power of the dread stillness of the church-yard, and deepening the horrors of the tomb.

In the north of Ireland, as well as elsewhere, the population has exceedingly increased, without any corresponding increase of the means of instruction. Time was when Shankhill was only an insignificant fishing village; and now behold the northern capital of the nation, Belfast, with its vast and industrious population, rich in commerce, and mighty in enterprise! The famine of the word of life, even in that splendid town, and in all the region round about, is great and sore. We shall here again resort to the unsuspicious testimony of clergymen of the Established church; and first to that of the Rev. H. Smith Cumming, of Ballymena, who says, "In large towns there are masses without the pale of Christianity, never seeking the rites of religion except when they come to get their children baptised, dragging on a miserable existence, alternately between necessary labour, and low-lived animal indulgence." To this we will subjoin the testimony of a clergyman of great weight in his own county, the Rev. Mr. Drew, who, together with the Venerable Archdeacon Mant, has recently terminated a tour of inquiry into the state of the diocese of Down and Connor, once the See of Jeremy Taylor. The investigation laid open a scene of the most appalling spiritual destitution, and it has led to the adoption of arrangements to erect a multitude of new edifices for Christian instruction and worship. Addressing the first public assembly ever seen in Ireland of the people and clergy, with the bishop at their head, and in the chair—a new thing in that country—Mr. Drew said, "It appears from the register of the parish church, that 1,500 are baptised in the year, and 800 females present themselves for churching, the greater part of whom never

attend the house of God. He declared in the sight of God and man, that there was more piety among Mahommedans than in parts of the district committed to his charge. He would prove it. A poor man called on him one day; he went with him up the hill to see a poor dying woman, where never foot of minister of any denomination had gone before! He there found men of substance, farmers, owners of cows and horses, who understood nothing about conversion, never attended worship, never prayed, nor had been taught to pray in their lives; and this within two miles of political, Protestant, generous, enlightened Belfast." *

These testimonies are but glimpses of the moral landscape of Ulster. They are also from the lips of men who have every inducement to abstain from exaggeration. The evidence is beneath the fact. Were we to walk abroad throughout the counties of that great province, we might report much of ignorance all but Popish, and of profession worse than none,—of Arianism, with its blighting influence, extending a dreary desolation over nearly the whole of a once delightful region, adorned by the fruits of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God; but we forbear enlargement. It suffices to say, that the pure Gospel, attended by a scriptural administration of its ordinances, and by Apostolic Church order, has nearly as much to contend with in Irish Protestantism as in Irish Popery. Great must be the effort, and great the power, which shall bring either back to the New Testament standard, to which, however, they must one day come, for all things are possible with God.

* Speeches at the Great Church Extension Meeting, Belfast, Dec. 1838.

Congregational Churches of Ireland! "By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?" You are as yet but feeble missionary stations, in a land far worse than heathen. Oh! what a work is that which lies before you. What wisdom and prudence, watchfulness and prayer, patient toil and self-sacrifice, must be yours, that you may efficiently conduct the mighty warfare! The promise, however, is yours; prophecy is on your side; you have the prayers and sympathies of thousands in England and Scotland. It is also cheering to reflect, that Ireland was once the Queen of Isles,—by pre-eminence the "*Island of Saints,*"—the glory of Europe,—the abode of science and piety,—and the fountain of Christian missions. Oh! how fallen. But she shall yet arise; the set time to favour her will come, and then the Lord will destroy the Man of Sin by the breath of his mouth, and by the brightness of his coming; and the *Emerald Isle* shall yet be filled with truth and righteousness. The wickedness of the wicked shall come to an end, and the righteous God, by whom hearts are searched, and actions are weighed, will establish the just. Be of good courage, and go on in the strength of the Most High, whose you are, and whom you serve. Great is his truth, and it shall prevail throughout the whole earth. Great has been his mercy to you, whereby he has made you to differ from the deluded and idolatrous millions around you. The same Almighty and Eternal Spirit, who brought back from the dead the Lord Jesus, and who hath quickened you when dead in trespasses and in sins, can speedily subdue the Popish myriads of Ireland,—your beloved fellow countrymen, for whom you "have great heaviness and continual

sorrow of heart." Brethren! distinguished is the honour, which, with all its trials and sorrows, belongs to your station. Be it yours, therefore, to cultivate a spirit worthy of the exalted place which you are called to occupy. Receive the exhortations of the bard of your country: "weep on;" sow in tears, and you shall reap in joy:

> "Weep on,—perhaps in after days
> They'll learn to love your name;
> When many a deed shall wake in praise,
> That now must sleep in blame!"*

Pastors of Ireland! gird up the loins of your mind, and thoroughly prepare for the glorious conflict; sleep with the Prophets of God; wake with the Apostles of Christ; dwell in unbroken communion with the spirits of the mighty dead, who pleaded for the truths of the Gospel, with the horrors of the Inquisition full in view, amid darkness, terror, and slavery, unawed by the vengeful fulminations of Papal wrath; who forced their way into Gospel liberty by bursting the massive barriers of ignorance, prejudice, and power; and who, with the weapons of Scripture truth, destroyed strongholds of sin, the completion of whose structure had been the labour of a hundred generations. Think of Luther and of Knox! Let the more than martyr spirit of those illustrious men become once more incarnate in you! Be fired with their holy zeal,—be filled with their all-victorious faith,—be clothed with their dauntless courage; and, in the strength of Christ, carry on the war of truth with the Man of Sin, until his throne and kingdom be no more, until the last

* Irish Melodies, No. IV.

wreck of the ruinous and impious system shall have been swept from the fair face of your mother isle, and until she shall have become, in piety, all that her poetic son wished for her in politics—

> " Great, glorious, and free—
> First flower of the earth, and first gem of the sea."*

* Irish Melodies, No. VII.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE VALUE AND NECESSITY OF LAY AGENCY IN EVANGELICAL OPERATIONS.

THE value and importance of lay agency are a matter of fact which, by an appeal to history and to experience, may be determined with precision and certainty. There are few questions connected with ecclesiastical economy, which may be discussed and decided with a greater degree of satisfaction, and more completely set at rest.

SECTION I.

OF THE TEST AND MEASURE OF VALUE.

THE test and measure of value is utility. Utility always relates to means for the accomplishment of an end or object. The measure of *present* utility, however, may not

be the true measure of inherent value. Time and experience may enhance value by increasing utility. The principle and the power may be inherent;—the development and the application may depend upon the skill of the agent. The inherent power of steam, for example, was always the same, but its value has been progressive. Its first action was perpendicular; and nothing was contemplated, beyond its application to the uses of coal-pits and water-works. In a moment, however, big with the future destinies of our world, the idea arose, that its action might be made to revolve. What an hour was this! The secret once discovered, the career of improvement began; and this fearful element has become a thing alike stupendous for its force and its flexibility; for the prodigious power which it can exert, and the ease, and precision, and ductility, with which it can be varied, and distributed, and applied. The trunk of an elephant, that can pick up a pin or rend an oak, is nothing to it. It can engrave a seal or forge an anchor;—it can spin a thread as fine as gossamer, or, in the face of wind and waves, waft a ship of the first class, with the speed of the roe, across the Atlantic. There is no other limit to its power, than the limit of the conflicting elements of fire and water, and mechanic skill.*

Lay power may be likened to steam power. Its value must be measured by its utility, and its utility by its adaptation to attain the end or object of saving souls, and advancing the honour of the Redeemer. To the extension and application of lay power, notwithstanding the feebleness of its present exhibition, in most sections of

* See Lord Jeffrey's Character of Watt.

the Church of Christ, there is absolutely no other limit than that of numbers, and pastoral capacity for its guidance. It may be employed in the consolation of a dying peasant, or in pouring the lights of science and piety over the halls of a college;—in cheering a prison cell, or in dispelling the darkness of an island;—in teaching a Sunday-school, or in enlightening an empire.

What the immortal Watt was in the mechanical, that Wesley was in the moral, world. "He encouraged the labours of the pious in every direction, in spreading the light through their respective neighbourhoods; and by this means, under the Divine blessing, he increased his own usefulness a thousandfold, and, instead of operating individually, powerful as that individual operation was, he became the director of a vast system, which remained at work in his personal absence, and was continually pouring into the Church of Christ its contributions of conquest from the world."* Unhappily, however, Wesley has not, like Watt, had his host of imitators and rivals. He is still alone, or almost alone, in this his true and distinguishing glory. That extraordinary man applied lay power to every species of moral and intellectual labour; among all classes, and in all places, among the young and the old, in schools, in "classes," in "bands," in local and itinerant—in occasional and regular preaching—in the army and in the navy—at home and abroad—in Europe and America; and he applied it every where with uniform success and boundless benefit to the cause of God. Tested by utility the value of lay agency, in his hands, was incalculably great. All see it;—all acknowledge his success;—who profits by it?

* Watson's Works, vol. vii. p. 284.

SECTION II.

OF THE ORIGIN AND EVIL OF ENGLISH PREJUDICE AGAINST LAY AGENCY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the importance of lay labour, it has not been generally appreciated among British churches. A strong prejudice has existed against it, which, like all our ecclesiastical abominations, had its origin in Popery. But why was not this prejudice removed by the Reformation? It was, to some extent, overcome in England, and nearly annihilated in Scotland; but, subsequently, it recovered strength in both countries. Even in the days of Henry VIII., the principle both of lay agency and itinerant preaching, was fully recognised, and in some degree adopted. The succeeding reign of Edward VI. in this, as in other respects, improved upon its predecessor; all, however, was lost in Mary, and but imperfectly recovered in Elizabeth. With this great queen, regularity was every thing,—religion nothing. Through her cruel favourite, Whitgift, she soon issued the mandate, that "none be allowed to preach, but such as had been regularly ordained." Fitness of knowledge, or fitness of character, were trifles in her esteem, not worth looking at, if the incumbents had been Episcopally ordained,—no matter what their attainments or their deportment,—all was well. Parker, in 1561. confessed, that most of the beneficed clergy of his diocese, were either ignorant

mechanics, or disguised Papists,—that many churches were shut up,—and that, in several counties, not a sermon had been preached, nor even a homily read, within twenty miles, for months. In the Convocation of the following year, held to agree upon and subscribe the Thirty-nine Articles, many clergymen were so ignorant, that they could not write their own names.* The morals, too, of many, were as defective as their knowledge. In Cornwall alone "there were 140 incumbents, not one of whom could preach a sermon; and most of them pluralists and non-residents, fornicators, adulterers, and gamesters on the Lord's day."† Ten thousand parishes in England had only about 2000 preachers, such as they were, to supply the wants of perishing multitudes. Still the Queen and Archbishop Whitgift not only persevered in their suppression of lay assistance, but fiercely excluded the whole body of the Nonconformists, utterly reckless of the results, and regardless of the perdition of millions. Sweet fruit of state alliance and support, and regal supremacy!

In this way the nation was taught to appreciate the mystic worth of "holy orders," and religious ceremonies and vestments! They were apt scholars. With the bulk of them the queen and her bishops were the infallible arbiters of right and wrong. A deeply Popish feeling, too, pervaded the hearts of the multitude. They readily concurred with the "powers," in their hostility to lay agency; and that hostility has been handed down from sire to son, while, in its course, it has experienced

* Brown, vol. i. p. 153. See also Hanbury's Memorials, p. 93.
† Brown, vol. i. p. 171.

two great revivals. The first of these revivals originated in the times of the Commonwealth, when lay agency prevailed to a great extent, and was, upon the whole, employed with great success. But, above all, we must trace church-and-king abhorrence of it, to the character and procedure of the parliamentary army, which might be likened to an assembly of churches and pastors, rather than to ordinary officers and troops. It is a strange fact, that, in most of the regiments, the officers united the spiritual duties of chaplains with their military functions! "In all the intervals of action, they occupied themselves in sermons, prayers, and exhortations; and the same emulation there attended them, which, in the field, is so necessary to support the honour of that profession. Wherever they lay in quarters, they excluded the minister from his pulpit, and, mounting that dangerous tribunal, conveyed their sentiments with all the authority which followed their power, their valour, their military exploits, united to their apparent zeal and fervour. The private soldiers, seized with the same spirit, employed their vacant hours in prayer, in perusing the Holy Scriptures, in religious conferences, where they compared the progress of their souls in grace, and mutually stimulated each other to farther advances in the great work of their salvation." * Such is the remarkable testimony even of the infidel historian, who is fully sustained by Neal, a writer of a very different order. What an army! What an example of lay agency! What an illustration, after all just abatements, of its value and importance! The officers of the Royalists were men of another mould; they

* Hume, vol. v. chap. ix. p. 403.

were not addicted to Puritanical irregularities, and their army was worthy of them. Profligacy, with all its hateful attendants, characterized them both, and the prostration of morals every where marked their melancholy progress.

On the Restoration, the spirit of evil seemed to have returned in the train of the king, and to have taken possession of the whole court, and most of the nation. Sin reigned through royalty. The deadliest hatred was cherished to the Nonconformists,—to their persons, their principles, and their practices. Their piety was an object of implacable disgust, as also the means by which it had been sustained and diffused. Lay preaching, and religious social exercises, were viewed with peculiar abhorrence, as an "iniquity to be punished by the judges." The wits of Charles' court vied in pouring their bitterest scorn upon all that appertained to piety and the Commonwealth. Its main pillars and chief ornaments were gibbetted by the hand of impious genius, as men who had

> "Reduced the Church to Gospel order,
> By rapine, sacrilege and murder;"
>
> HUDIBRAS.

and of all their crimsoned deeds, the employment of lay elders, or preachers, was not the least. The court and the bishops were comforted, under the melancholy remembrance of their late calamities, by the responsive strains of the poets, and orators, and historians of the Restoration, who, in their turn, took ample vengeance on the Presbyterians and Independents, and all others, who had been concerned in the "great rebellion." They

detested lay labour and Christian discipline, and, in particular, all inquiry into men's experience of the grace of God, as much as they detested Gospel doctrine.*

The second of these revivals of prejudice against lay agency, originated in Methodism,—with all its imperfections, a glorious edifice, chiefly reared by the hands of laymen, under the guidance of two or three clerical architects. When this great work began to rise the prejudice in question revived with all the freshness and ferocity of Popish times. Though not the whole, yet this was at least the head and front of the offence of Wesley and Whitefield. It was a sin against ecclesiastical order, not to be forgiven, and which, in the eyes of even good men, and moderate Churchmen, portended the direst evils to the Church of England.

Many minor causes might be adduced of this prejudice, both on the part of the Church and of the world. On the part of the world, one of the most secret and most powerful is, that lay agency is almost always associated with more or less of the pure Gospel of Christ, so that

* The following, from Butler, is a description of a lay brother:—

———————— This zealot
Is of a mongrel, diverse kind,
Cleric before, and lay behind;
A lawless, linsey woolsey brother,
Half of one order, half another;
A creature of amphibious nature,
On land a beast, a fish in water,
That always preys on grace or sin,
A sheep without, a wolf within;
This fierce inquisitor has chief
Dominion over men's belief
And manners. HUDIBRAS.

hatred of the message recoils upon the messenger. All this is plain and intelligible; but how shall we account for the prejudice of Dissenting Churches—yea, with all their superior intelligence, even of Congregational Churches? The truth is, that the prejudice of Dissenters in England is largely inherited from the Church Establishment, whence a vast proportion of them originally came; it is founded in ignorance; it is fostered by pride; and it is sustained by neglect of inquiry,—a neglect which has been fatal to the best interests of mankind. Inquiry alone is wanted to render its value clear and manifest even to Churchmen, who are, at this hour, its best and boldest advocates.

SECTION III.

OF THE CHANGE OF PUBLIC FEELING RELATIVE TO LAY AGENCY.

We readily confess the utmost anxiety respecting the feelings of the Congregational body upon this subject. It is of the greatest moment that they all think aright, and think alike, concerning it. It is not enough, however, to neutralize hostility, where it exists among them. Their hearty approval is not enough. We require their awakened, devout, intense conviction of its unspeakable value and importance. Their usefulness and interests, at the

present time, most materially depend upon it. Without this, the successful "Essays" may appear, and a little temporary talk and bustle may follow, and then all will die away as a vision of the night, and the churches will slumber on. One thing, however, is certain; the best portion of the Church Establishment is at length alive to its full importance, and beginning to carry out the principle with the utmost energy and efficiency. She is fast wiping off the reproach laid against her by the celebrated Wesleyan, the late Rev. R. Watson, who says,—"Nothing has been so unfortunate for the Protestant part of Christendom, and for England in particular, as the prejudices which have prevented the adoption of that auxiliary and subordinate agency by which the usefulness of the regular ministry might have been so much extended. How pitiable is the sight, which may be so often witnessed, in our own country, of a faithful and zealous minister of the establishment, tracked with the eye of jealous distrust through all his walks of usefulness, lest he should carry the services of preaching and exhortation out of the precincts of his own Church, and encourage a lay administration even in the humblest departments of devotion and zeal."* This "pitiable sight," to be sure, has not yet quite disappeared either from the Episcopal Bench, or from the high places of the dignified clergy. The "proud prelate" politician,—the cold and carnal man of mere forms,—the sullen descendant of Whitgift and of Parker,—the "bigot of the iron time,"—born two centuries behind the age to which he rightfully belongs, perhaps a builder of churches and a breaker-up

* Works, vol. viii. p. 285.

of Christian brotherhoods, a staunch supporter of every abuse, and a settled foe of every liberal measure, a friend of the Church and an enemy of the Gospel—such a man may possibly here and there yet be found; but he belongs to the past, and, when he expires, will, we trust, have no successor. The men of whom we speak are men loved and revered by their contemporaries, and whose memory will be honoured by a righteous posterity. It is a truth, and it is time that the Dissenters should hear it, that, upon this point, the really evangelical bishops are far in advance of them.

It is now just ten years since the present bishop of Calcutta, who, notwithstanding his bigotry, must be allowed to occupy a first place in the very front rank of his order, and to be one of the most efficient ministers and practical men of the present age, penned the following remarkable paragraph :—" Lay agency is of incalculable moment; a minister cannot undertake everything himself; he must not fritter away his time; he must not widen too much his field of personal effort; he must concentrate; he must influence; he must be the centre to a hundred hands and minds moving around him. This is more especially the case in populous places where the actual efforts of any one or two ministers would be lost in detail, and his public instructions would be hasty and indigested effusions, if he attempted individual instruction. Wisdom, therefore, must be exercised; others must be set to work, and a machinery be erected of which he takes only the general guidance. Cases may occur in which the department of a minister's duty may be writing books, directing public societies, travelling in order to animate

others;—each must judge for himself before God;—there must be secretaries, and speakers, and visiters of our great religious societies, as well as pastors of particular flocks. But these considerations only increase the importance of the great body of ministers giving their whole souls to the particular inspection of the people, partly by themselves, and partly by the agency of others. Nothing will so immediately tend to a revival of grace and the real power of Christianity—nothing will more rouse to the redemption of time—nothing will more separate and sever the heart from the vanities of the world, the calls of human folly, the impertinence of visiting, the corruptions of pleasure—nothing will more tend to sound and solid success in our ministry; our estimate of what constitutes a real blessing will rise; our excessive reliance on mere preaching will be moderated." *

Also about this time ten years, the bishop of Chester, in his primary charge to his clergy, thus enforced the employment of lay agency. Having been urging with great power the duty of the *individual instruction* of the people, he thus anticipates the question:—"Who is sufficient for these things?"—"Certainly in our larger parishes it is not possible for the strength or activity of the clergy alone to provide for such individual instruction. But there is a resource at hand; when the population is moderate nothing is wanting but resolution and contrivance, and in the case of a denser population the bane and the antidote, the evil and the remedy, are found together. The same population which presses so heavily upon the clergyman by its variety of ranks, and superior degree of

* Introductory Essay to the Reformed Pastor, pp. 44, 45.

education, supplies many fellow-workers who may assist the minister and diminish his labours. In this manner the apostles were enabled to execute the manifold concerns which lay upon them. It would evidently have been impracticable, even for those who had an extraordinary measure of inspiration, to communicate to the multitudes who embraced Christianity, all the preliminary and all the collateral knowledge, which a heathen required before he could become an intelligent Christian. They have left us an example. Let the minister of a populous district, using careful discrimination of character, select such as 'are worthy' and 'of good report,' and assign them their several employments under his direction. What image more exemplifying the reality of pastoral care,—what more truly Christian picture can be presented to our contemplation than that of a minister uniting with himself the best disposed and the most competent portion of his parishioners, and superintending counsels, and directing plans, which have God for their object, and the eternal welfare of his people for their end, —seizing every opportunity of general and individual good, correcting mischiefs at their first rising, providing for the spiritual wants of every different age and class, and thus striving as far as may be allowed to present 'every man perfect in Christ Jesus!' "—" Nor is this any visionary notion, pleasing in idea but impracticable in reality. Numerous parishes of different degrees of population have been brought under such discipline with more or less success. And I feel convinced, that whoever is anxious to promote the glory of God, to assist the most important interests of his fellow creatures, to confirm the

security of his country, to maintain the stability of his church, can ensure none of these great objects more effectually than by means like these."*

The same prelate, in a sermon, delivered last year in London, on behalf of the *Pastoral Aid Society*, recurs to the subject, and enforces it with a clearness of perception and a vigour of expression not inferior to Horsley himself. "If none," says he, "except those who are solemnly set apart and devoted to the ministry, are to advise and instruct their neighbours in religion, what multitudes must ever remain uninstructed, and unadvised! And how is that time to arrive which Scripture teaches us to expect when "all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest?" My brethren, if we shut out from spiritual usefulness, all who are not ordained to spiritual things; if we do not rather excite and urge them to such duties, we contradict the plain commands of our religion.

"The Scriptures enjoin all Christians to 'exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day,'—to 'edify one another,'—to 'speak to one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs,' to 'warn the unruly,' to 'comfort the feeble minded,' to 'assemble themselves together that they may provoke unto love and to good works,' to visit the 'fatherless and widows in their affliction.' So speaks the word of God. And is man wiser than God? Is man to see danger where God prescribes duty? To forbid when God commands?

"Thus Satan would have it, for thus is his kingdom maintained; thus is darkness perpetuated, and religion,

* Bishop of Chester's Primary Charge, pp. 26–31.

instead of an active principle, becomes a superstitious notion. But we protest against such error, as the worst remaining relic of Papal usurpation, bred and nourished, not in the times of primitive Christianity, but in the dark days of its corruption, when they chose to keep the key of knowledge to themselves, who were afraid to trust the people with it, and allowed the priest's lips alone to speak, that he alone might enjoy the power which belongs to knowledge. Never, never, brethren, shall we be a Christian community till this error is dispelled; till it is with us as it was with those who were first called Christians, when every one who has the knowledge of Christ in his own heart, believes it his duty to bring to the same knowledge the individuals with whom he is connected—his child, his servant, his dependent, his labourer, his neighbour. Then, and not before, may the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.*"

These noble and enlightened views of Calcutta and of Chester, are cordially shared by others of the bishops, and the flower of the clergy, and by the great organ of the Evangelical party—"the Christian Observer."† They also pervade the ministry of the northern Establishment. The following is a specimen of the admirable manner in which they illustrate the duty of private Christians:—

"An apostle or evangelist seldom visited a city, or a town, without planting a congregation in it, and on his departure the faithful were so thoroughly embued with his spirit, that they carried on the work, and acted as missionaries in the streets and villages where they resided.

* Sermon, pp. 17, 19. † See Ch. Obs. App. 1828, et passim.

Every believer felt himself answerable for the interest and honour of our holy religion, and however low his rank, or slender his talents, gratitude to God, and compassion for men, compelled him to exert his best energies to make known the glad tidings of redeeming mercy, and to lead his perishing neighbours to attend to their everlasting safety. If the churches were at rest, believers endeavoured to strengthen and establish each other in their attachment to the gospel, and to augment their numbers by accessions from the ranks of idolaters. If the churches were broken up and scattered by persecution, this extended the knowledge of the truth and accelerated its triumphs; for the dispersed became heralds of the cross, and went every where preaching the word."* The same writer, not satisfied with this general demand, contends for the employment of a body of laymen as occasional helpers of the ministry. In reference to the thorough cultivation of a given locality, he says—"In this important work the labours of parochial missionaries are invaluable. The ministrations of this useful class of men are not intended to rival or supersede the services of the regular pastor, but only to enlarge and supplement them. The pastor is multiplied in the person of the missionaries, and while he is occupied with other parts of his duty, they compensate for his absence, and carry forward the great work of his office." Such are the practical views of the bulk of the Scottish Clergy. Dr. Chalmers, too, has put forth all his strength, and all his eloquence, in defence of the principle which he has for ever set at rest.†

* Dr. Hamilton's Life and Remains, Vol. ii. p. 20. Ib. p. 69.
† Chalmers' Civic Economy, Vol. i. p. 305.

It is a cheering fact, that the minds of wise and good men of all denominations are nearly made up as to the value, importance, and absolute necessity of the largest possible measure of lay agency to overtake the wants of the country. The standing ministry of every sect are wholly unequal to it, and we cannot increase them in sufficient numbers. The choice, therefore, does not lie between clerical and lay agency, but between the latter and none! If we had the men, we have not the means to educate them; if they were standing ready prepared, we cannot support them. There is, moreover, much of the work, which does not require either the training or the talents desirable or necessary for the ministry, and which does not demand the entire consecration of time and service. What we want is, an abundant supply of well prepared lay agency,—and the people by whom it is most cultivated, "they shall receive the blessing from the Lord." The facts of the next chapter will furnish the best proof and illustration of the value and importance of this species of agency.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE BENEFITS WHICH HAVE RESULTED FROM LAY AGENCY IN GREAT BRITAIN, AND IN FOREIGN PARTS.

In referring to what has been accomplished heretofore by the efforts of lay brethren, we have to encounter very considerable difficulties. These efforts have, for the most part, been so blended with pastoral labour as to render it no easy matter to separate them; and, even in cases where such endeavours are less mixed, it is still felt to be a perplexing task to make an accurate estimate of their effects. It is, therefore, deemed the more safe and practicable method to deal chiefly with causes; and, with their effects only in so far as they appear in separate, certain, and indisputable facts. Again, the efficiency of lay agency, in general, is so dependent upon regular ministerial exertion, either in a local or in an itinerant form, and itinerancy is so vital an element in Home missions, that the subjects are in reality one, and inseparable. On this ground, therefore, we must also refer to some of the most prominent facts relative to itinerancy.

SECTION I.

OF THE BENEFITS OF LAY AGENCY IN ENGLAND.

It will be instructive to consider the subject of the benefits of lay agency in England at three distinct periods.

1st.—*Lay agency at the Reformation.* The first semblance of lay labour for public good, stands in connexion with the sacred Scriptures. In the earlier part of Henry's reign, it was death to teach children the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, or the Apostles' Creed, in the mother tongue. For this crime, six men and a woman were burnt at Coventry, April 4, 1519. In the year 1541, however, things took a turn. The king commanded a Bible to be procured for every parish, and to be laid in the church for general use. Six copies of it were chained to different pillars of St. Paul's, that all who could read might have access to them; but upon these pillars, Bishop Bonner, if possible to abridge the benefit, ordered placards to be posted strictly prohibiting any person from *reading aloud,* or drawing crowds about him by explanation, exposition, or disputation. The cruel prohibition was despised; its effect was to shut out the bulk of the citizens, since only a few could read. The populace, thirsting for the word of life, and unable to draw for themselves, from the wells of salvation, assembled in multitudes to hear it read. Many had their children expressly taught for the purpose, and brought them there that they

themselves might listen to the voice of the Lord through the lips of their little ones. This first effort of lay agency in our country was fraught with effects, and attended with an importance, which it is difficult to estimate. "*Readers*, indeed, in those days," as Archdeacon Blackburne has truly said, "were but scarce, and happy was the company who could meet with a person with an audible voice and a distinct pronunciation, that would read the Scriptures to them. Our histories give us accounts of the vast crowds of people who attended such meetings in Paul's Church, and other places where English Bibles were provided for that purpose. This happened in the reign of King Henry VIII., and King Edward VI., and what proficiency the people made in Christian knowledge, by this application and attention to the word of God, appears by the readiness, good sense, and solidity, with which even some of the poorer sort answered the Popish Doctors who were appointed to question them on the subject of what was called their heresy, in the barbarous reign of Queen Mary." It is to be remembered, that the listening crowds were not merely auditors: they were every where juries trying the merits of the Romish religion—juries who claimed to judge both of "the law and the fact;" and such were their daily verdicts,* that Bonner did his utmost to suppress discus-

* The progress of the Bible question is admirably put by one of England's greatest poets, in the following lines:—

> In times o'ergrown with rust and ignorance,
> A gainful trade their clergy did advance;
> When want of learning kept the laymen low,
> And none but priests were authorized to know:
> When what small knowledge was, in them did dwell,
> And he a god who could but read and spell:

sion, and instigated Henry to publish threats of removing the Bibles, if the people continued thus to abuse their privilege, by observations or expressions of opinion.*

Another signal service rendered by the efforts of laymen, respects the First and Second *Books of Homilies*. Cranmer laboured hard to provide a supply of proper preachers for parochial instruction, that the most eminent might be at liberty to devote themselves to itinerant work; but so few could be had, that the bulk of the nation continued in gross ignorance. As far, and as soon as possible, to remedy, in some measure, this lamentable evil, the *Homilies* were composed, and distributed over the land, to be read by such laymen as were competent, and likewise

Then mother Church did mightily prevail,
She parcelled out the Bible by retail:
But still expounded what she sold or gave;
To keep it in her power to damn or save:
Scripture was scarce, and, as the market went,
Poor laymen took salvation on content;
As needy men take money good or bad;
God's word they had not, but the *priest's* they had.
Yet whate'er false conveyances they made,
The lawyer still was certain to be paid.
In those dark times they learned their knack so well,
That, by long use, they grew infallible:
At last a knowing age began t' inquire
If they the book, or that did them, inspire:
And making narrower search, they found, though late,
That what they thought the priest's, was *their* estate:
Taught by the will produced—the written word —
How long they had been cheated, on record;
Then every man who saw the title fair,
Claim'd a child's part, and put in for a share;
Consulted soberly his private good;
And saved himself as cheap as e'er he could.

Dryden's Religio Laici.

* Aikman, vol. i. p. 99.

by clergymen who could not preach.* Thus the *readers* co-operated with the itinerants; the labours of the latter creating a demand for the humble services of the former. It also deserves especial notice that a portion of the principal itinerants were "unlicensed teachers." The university of Cambridge possessed and exercised the "right" conferred by the Pope, "of sending forth twelve preachers yearly, who might preach for life without any licence from the bishop, which contributed to the edification of many thousand souls."† This powerful instrument, itinerant preaching, was employed in effecting the first great moral movement in the Reformation. The council of Edward sent popular preachers through the nation to remove men's prejudices against the Protestant religion, an object to which their rhetoric and reasoning mightily contributed. Of Edward's six chaplains in ordinary, of whom John Knox was one, four were always itinerating through England, Scotland, and Wales.‡ In those days, itinerant labour was not deemed the less, but the more important and honourable species of Ecclesiastical service. Coverdale, Samson, Fox, Humphries, and others of the Puritan clergy, who continued in the church, became itinerant preachers, lecturers, or chaplains, as opportunity offered, and, in this way, were the instruments of extensive usefulness. Of all the itinerants of that age, the most illustrious was Bernard Gilpin, the "*Northern Apostle,*" who annually visited and preached in the most neglected parishes in Northumberland, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland, which were in a most affect-

* Brown, vol. i. pp. 114, 116. † Ibid. vol. i. p. 156.
‡ King Edward's Journal.

ing state of spiritual destitution. Two-thirds of the parishes in the diocese of Ely, where he chiefly expended his labours, were either wholly without ministers, or possessed only careless non-residents, who "fed themselves and not the flock."

2nd.—*Lay Agency during the Commonwealth.* We have already seen the vast extent to which lay preaching prevailed in the Parliamentary army, during the "great rebellion," and its marvellous effects upon the mass of the troops. These effects may certainly be claimed by us, and classed with the benefits resulting from this species of labour. The body of orthodox and accomplished chaplains, who went out with the army of Essex, left it after the battle of Edgehill; and then it was, more especially, that a multitude of lay labourers sprung up among the forces, and, whatever may have been the more remote effects of this event upon the religion of the country, one thing is sure, that by it the morals and discipline of the army sustained no loss; both were improved rather than deteriorated. But we now speak of an after-period, the days of the Commonwealth, when this species of preaching spread also extensively over the nation. The question is—What were the measure and character of its effects? It is true, it was not the sole cause of such effects as seemed to result from it; but it contributed most materially towards their production. Reserving to its proper place the consideration of the evil which mingled with these efforts, we appeal to one established fact—*the general state of the nation while such efforts prevailed and continued.* An upright ecclesiastical historian, who looked with no friendly eye upon either

Cromwell, or the Commonwealth, or the Independents, declares, that "better laws were never made in England, nor good laws ever so well executed. The dress, the language, and conversation of the people, were sober and virtuous. Scarcely one instance of bankruptcy was known in a year, nor could bankrupts ever regain their character. Drunkenness, whoredom, profane swearing, and other debaucheries, were quite out of fashion. To live as beasts, without worshipping God in secret, and in families, was held infamous. Not one stage play was acted, for many years, in the whole kingdom. But no sooner had Charles ascended his throne, than debauchery and wickedness of every form broke forth, and overflowed all ranks in the kingdom."* After all that has been said of the enthusiasm, fanaticism, and disorder of that period, still here is the *fact*, of a kingdom assuming an appearance such as no Gentile nation had ever presented before—a kingdom whose morals, commerce, and legislation, might have served the double purpose of an example and a reproach

* Brown, vol. i. p. 295.

Pandering to the passions of this prince was the condition of the royal patronage to men of letters, hence the indignant lines of *Scott* on the conduct of *Charles* in debasing the genius of *Dryden*, and preventing his proceeding with a great work which he had projected;—see Dryden's Essay on Satire prefixed to his Juvenal :—

> And Dryden, in immortal strain,
> Had raised the Table Round again;
> But that a ribald king and court
> Bade him toil on to make them sport;
> Demanded for their niggard pay,
> Fit for their souls, a looser lay,
> Licentious satire, song, and play;
> The world defrauded of the high design,
> Profaned the God-given strength and marred the lofty line.
>
> *Marmion.*

to the whole civilized world; and, after the king's return, and the suppression of all such lay efforts and irregularities, and the restoration of order and orthodox discipline, here is the other opposite *fact*, of the same nation becoming the subject of a change of the most deleterious and degrading character, and sinking into an abyss of mingled and manifold abominations. Of systems, as of men, may we not say—"By their fruits ye shall know them?" It is not denied, nor must it be concealed, that, during the existence of the Commonwealth, the country enjoyed the labours of a multitude of distinguished preachers, of various sects, to which, doubtless, combined with other circumstances, especially with the proper administration of the law, must be attributed the principal share of the surprising moral change which was wrought in the aspect of the nation. After granting this, however, and candour can claim nothing more, we must be allowed to set down the immense remainder to the credit of lay labour, carried on with various degrees of prudence, of propriety, and of zeal; but, in all degrees, constraining attention to divine things, scattering innumerable fragments of Gospel truth, and stimulating the study of the sacred Scriptures.

3rd.—*At the Rise of Methodism.* The great revival of religion, which this term indicates, has existed about one hundred years; and its effects have already extended over a large portion of the whole earth. From its very commencement, it has been equally characterised and promoted by the labours of laymen. When speaking on this point, the foremost place is unquestionably due to Wesley. That extraordinary man, as we have already

stated, made a series of singular experiments on the subject. It is now too late to doubt, whether Methodism has been attended with beneficial results. Its work is its own witness;—by its results it is now fully known to mankind. It has been an overflowing fountain of good to the human race. Its happy effects, though most abundant, where most required, among the millions of the humble poor, are not confined to any class, or to any one aspect of any, or of all classes, affected by it. To specify and estimate its blessed fruits, at home and abroad, in the church and in the world, would be to write volumes. Let it suffice to say, that, whatever be its benefits, they have been, to an enormous extent, the result of lay agency. What an illustration Wesleyan Methodism presents of the value of system, the force of union, and the power of numbers! The construction and peculiar character of its machinery are thoroughly known to very few, beyond its own mystic enclosure. Here there is nothing loose or laid on. It is a solid and well-compacted fabric. Every man finds that he is something more than a mere attendant; that he is a component, fixed part of a definite, organized society, in which he enjoys privileges, and is bound to discharge duties—duties, involving no small sacrifice of time, of labour, and of property. That ecclesiastical sovereign, the president of Conference—the hundred senior preachers who compose it—the immense remainder of juniors—the unnumbered throng of local preachers—the still greater host, both male and female, of class-leaders—the army of Sunday-school teachers, and every admitted member—the whole presents such a confederation of lay

agency—such an accumulation of moral might, as the earth has not witnessed since the days of the Apostles. Such is the cause now in operation, and on every hand the intelligent observer beholds himself surrounded with its gigantic and glorious effects;—England, America—the world is strewed with them.

Next to Wesley stands the immortal Whitefield, who was a patron and promoter of lay labour to a prodigious extent. If he employed it with less system than Wesley, it was only because his whole plan was less systematic; but still he himself employed it with, at least, equal cordiality, and, in his own day, it was employed by others, in connexion with his labours, and with his full sanction, perhaps, in as large a measure, and with equal success. Nay, as he led the way to Wesley in field-preaching, so he preceded him in a prompt approval and employment of lay labour of every kind, and was never for a moment the subject of those misgivings which at first filled the mind of his illustrious friend.

In regard to this matter, we point with delight to the vast expansion of the Congregational body, and say, Behold a portion of the good effected by the efforts of Whitefield's laymen! They laid the foundation of many an interest where, in connexion with the Independents, a glorious work is now proceeding among the souls of men. Nor must we overlook the extent to which this sort of labour has been in use among Congregational churches, during the last half century, and the happy effects which have resulted from it. In the form of tract distribution, of Christian instruction, of city missions, of village preaching, and Sabbath school tuition, an

enormous amount of lay effort has been put forth, and with the best effects, by the Independents. Not a little has been achieved; but we must attempt unspeakably more. The contemplation of the past presents us with ample grounds of encouragement for the future.

SECTION II.

OF THE BENEFITS OF LAY AGENCY IN SCOTLAND.

The Scottish Reformation furnishes the historian and the theologian with an admirable theme either for narrative or dissertation: it pours a flood of light upon the subject of this treatise. No where among religious establishments has the principle of lay agency been brought so fully out. No where has the Reformation from Popery been so complete as in Scotland;—no where so imperfect as in England. The reason is obvious. The work was led on, in England, by the prince, in a great degree against the people;—in Scotland, it was led on by the people against the prince. In the one case the people rose against the new religion; in the other, against the old. The Scotch Reformation was the work of almost a generation of inquiry, controversy, and suffering. The popular reception of Reform principles, throughout the bulk of the nation, therefore, *preceded* their legal establishment, so that the masses

were not only prepared to approve the change, but to support it by property and life. In England, the reverse of all this was the case. The work of reform, as finished by Elizabeth, was a question of, how much of the old religion can be preserved? In Scotland, it was a question of, how shall its last vestige be most thoroughly obliterated? In England, the Ecclesiastical fabric was left untouched; in Scotland, it was wholly destroyed, and replaced by a new creation.

These facts sufficiently account for the otherwise surprising difference between the original Ecclesiastical constitutions of the two countries with respect to lay agency. From the time that Elizabeth ascended the throne, such agency was wholly repudiated; it was entirely suppressed by the royal authority. Among the Scotch Reformers, the principle of lay agency was most fully recognised, and the practice adopted on the largest possible scale. Wesley himself did not make a more wise, and vigorous, and successful use of laymen, than did Knox and his companions in reformation. Time was when Scotland was the wonder of Europe, and the boast of Protestantism;—but whatever she was or became, she owed it, instrumentally, in a very great degree, to her lay agency. The history of the period, speaking generally, presents the picture of a nation whose children were all at school —whose people were all at church—whose houses, from the peasant's to the peer's, were houses of prayer—whose public pleasures were those of public devotion—whose piety was very general, and whose morality was almost universal. The knowledge of the Lord flowed like a tide over the lowland country, and through the

mountain glens. The word of God became the object of popular study;—it was the entire school-book of the children, and the library of the cottage. It was nearly in every house, and in every hand. To understand the Papal controversy was the aim and ambition of all, and, in some good measure, the attainment of all. Religion occupied the whole nation, with an intensity hardly conceivable. The discussion of the entire question partook in the highest degree of a logical and metaphysical character, and furnished a decidedly severe intellectual exercise; so much so, as to affect the complete character of the national mind and the national morals. The whole heart and soul of the country were so thoroughly penetrated and possessed, influenced and moulded, by the force of the new principles, as to give a character and colour to every succeeding age; and, notwithstanding the great and universal national deterioration, that force is not yet entirely spent. Its mighty impress is still seen.

Now, in our advocacy, we point to that nation and boldly say—Behold the beneficial, the blessed, the glorious results of lay agency! There was in this case, however, a happy conjunction of two circumstances—the limited numbers of the population, and the unlimited employment of laymen. By means of this conjunction, almost the entire field was invested—every ridge, and every corner of it, might be said to be brought under moral culture. The power of Divine truth had laid the nation prostrate before it, and a system of means was every where instituted, of a nature singularly calculated to maintain the conquest. In such a work as this, it can hardly be deemed a digression to delineate, in a few

words, the chief features of that system; and seeing that—as has been stated in the opening of this chapter —itinerancy cleared the way, and created the demand for lay agency, the order of nature and of history requires a primary reference to it. While it would be interesting to draw upon the original histories of the period, it will conduce to brevity, if we give the essence of the testimony in the words of one of Scotland's most gifted men, the celebrated author of "the Protestant,"—a man who, by his immortal writings, did more for the cause of Protestantism than any other man who has appeared since Knox's own times:—

"Scotland owes more to the Reformation than any other nation in the world, because she derived greater benefit from it;—and, though it is seldom thought of, and perhaps not generally known, this was owing to itinerant preaching. A few attempts had been made to promote the cause of truth, in this way, by Patrick Hamilton, and one or two more, but they were soon committed to the flames and burnt to ashes. It was reserved for John Knox to shake, and ultimately to overthrow the power of Popery in this kingdom, and he did this, in a great measure, by means of itinerant preaching. The great men who then conducted the affairs of the kingdom perceived the benefit which resulted from the itinerant labours of such a man;—they encouraged him to persevere, and, under their protection, he went preaching through most parts of the kingdom, in which the Saxon-English of that day was understood. The consequence of which was, that great numbers received the genuine Gospel of Christ, abandoned Popery, and

adopted a more simple and scriptural mode of worship than many other countries that threw off the same yoke. The monasteries and all their chambers of imagery fell prostrate, like the walls of Jericho at the blast of the rams' horns trumpets, not by any miraculous interposition, but from a conviction in the minds of the people, that they were a great public nuisance, and a pest to society, the removal of which was necessary for the honour of the country, and the comfort of all its families. On the fall of the monasteries, their inmates took flight, and they have never since been able to muster in any great strength, or number, in this part of the world. But after the death of Knox, itinerant preaching fell into disuse, and then into disrepute, and was little practised in Scotland for two hundred years." *

The next step was to provide instruction for the whole body of the adult and juvenile population. To effect this the first and second *Books of Discipline* provided five classes of instructors—readers, exhorters, doctors or teachers, ministers or pastors, and superintendents—the three first orders being laymen. To each of these classes was assigned their appropriate function; but as, in a future chapter, we shall have occasion to refer to them, and some collateral matters of great moment, for purposes of illustration, the subject may here be allowed to terminate.

In modern times Scotland stands pre-eminent in the illustrations which she furnishes of the benefits of lay agency. Perhaps there is no class of Christians more

* Life of M'Gavin, p. 360.

thoroughly emancipated from Popish bondage, on this subject, than the Scotch Independents. It is a fact, which presents a beautiful parallel to the rise of Calvinistic Methodism in Wales, that the Congregational body of Scotland originated in the labours of laymen. At a time when spiritual death extensively prevailed in Scotland—when the pure Gospel of Christ was heard from only a few pulpits in the Establishment, and when the Presbyterian Dissenters very largely partook of the spirit of a cold formality, it pleased God to stir up the minds of certain individuals to exercise compassion on the perishing multitudes of their fellow countrymen. The finger of Providence was peculiarly marked in the awakening dispensation. Robert Haldane—a gentleman of large fortune, of a highly cultivated understanding and commanding character—on coming to know the truth as it is in Jesus, was led to enter very deeply into the subject of Christian missions. Filled with an intense and pure desire to benefit the millions of India by the preaching of the cross, he opened his mind to three individuals, the Rev. Greville Ewing, William Innes, and David Bogue—men more worthy than those, of him and of the mighty work to which he invited them, the united kingdom could not have furnished;—to these ministers he proposed that they should go on a mission to India, he engaging to sell his estates for their support, and to accompany them in person to the field of labour;—a proposal and a deed to which there is no parallel in modern times.

These gentlemen entered cordially into his views. The estates were sold, and preparations rapidly advancing,

when the mighty project was checked and crushed by the jealousy of the government, which at that time was hostile to such efforts in India. Mr. Haldane then turned his whole mind, his vast energies and resources, to the spiritual condition of his native land, and to the best method of diffusing the Gospel of Christ among its population. This object involved the discussion of the question—"Who have a right to preach the Gospel?" This question was debated with much warmth and ability, till the conclusion was reached, "that it is the right, nay, the paramount duty, of every Christian who knows the Gospel, and is duly qualified, to preach it to his fellow sinners." This point once settled, the principle was forthwith carried out by two individuals brought from the opposite ends of the earth—James Haldane, brother of Robert, from the East Indies, and John Aikman, from the West Indies. These two excellent men travelled the whole length and breadth of their native land, every where preaching the word of life to listening multitudes. Many others in various degrees acted on the principle. Congregational Churches were shortly formed of the new converts and others, in many parts of the country. Mr. Ewing and Mr. Innes resigned their charges in the Established Church, and joined the infant Congregational body. To Mr. Ewing from the first, Congregational principles have owed more than to any other individual. He has been the nursing father of the denomination, the guide of its youth, the sage and learned expounder and defender of its principles, the tutor of its ministers, the prime promoter of its union and its interests. In Dr. Wardlaw, whose praise is in all the churches of the

empire, he subsequently found a colleague, whose worth and fitness require no eulogy. From that time to the present, lay agency has been employed on a constantly increasing scale, and with various, yet great success, to promote the salvation of souls. Thus one of the most enlightened, active, and useful religious bodies in modern times, has been originated by the labours of laymen. We have recorded simply so much of the history as is necessary to our purpose.

SECTION III.

OF THE BENEFITS OF LAY AGENCY IN WALES.

Wales supplies a large amount of admirable illustration of the beneficial results of lay preaching. Here, too, on our first approach to the subject, we are met by itinerancy and martyrdom. The Rev. John Penry, or ap Henry, a man of learning, piety, and patriotism, was the first person that preached the Gospel to his countrymen in their own language. He published, in 1588, a book setting forth the public wants and disorders of his country, the necessity of reforming its religion, and the way to accomplish it. Some time afterwards he addressed "An Exhortation to the Governors and People of Her Majesty's Country of Wales, to labour earnestly to have the Gospel

planted among them."* For this treasonable conduct he was apprehended as an enemy to the state; and in May, 1593, was executed at Tyburn. Such was the reward assigned to a pious and patriotic man for zealous service and wholesome counsel, by Prelacy in the latter days of Elizabeth! A nobler victim than Penry never perished on the murderous altar either of Prelate or of Pope. He was worthy to taste the same cup with Barrowe and Greenwood;—this righteous *triumviri* were the first martyrs of Independency in England.†

Better times, however, awaited that country. Howell Harris, Esq. of Trevecca, Brecknockshire, a man who had himself through grace believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 1735, commenced a course of lay labour of a very remarkable character, which was attended with most important results. He went from house to house in his native parish, exhorting sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Advancing onward, he soon entered the parishes adjacent. He increased in courage and boldness at every step; from conversation, he proceeded to exposition; and from that to preaching. Like a beacon of fire blazing on the summit of Snowdon, he soon excited the eager attention of the whole country, and great multitudes, wherever he appeared, assembled to hear his addresses. That his labours might be made to bear upon the youth, he established a school at Trevecca, and thence removed it to the parish church, to which numbers flocked for instruction. He sowed beside all waters. The Welsh are a

* Aikman p. 325.

† See a copious account of this most interesting sufferer, in Hanbury's "Historical Memorials," an invaluable work just published, p. 71.

musical people, and meetings were established among the younger people for improvement in sacred music. Howell Harris frequently made one at such meetings, that he might urge eternal things upon their attention, and, according to history, he did this with great success. This experiment amongst the young, with its results, was attended with important consequences. He saw at once the benefits which would arise from association, and he accordingly established regular meetings of serious persons, for spiritual conversation and religious exercises, in several places. Thus was laid the foundation of what is now denominated Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. For a time all was quiet. He superintended the school through the day, preached on week nights, on the Sabbath, and on holidays. Opposition arose, however, in due time, and its first act was to prevent him holding his school at the parish church. This harsh step prodigiously contributed to further that which his opposers considered the mischief. Released from the daily drudgery of the school, he could now preach wherever he was called, over the whole country, which he accordingly did three, four, and five times a-day. His sermons were not artificial distributions of elaborate thought; indeed they were not sermons at all, in the usual sense. He selected no text, he merely poured out his ideas and feelings as the occasion prompted, in a stream of terrible warning and remonstrance, mixed with Gospel statement, experience, and morality. The man, his preaching, and his conduct, all were a novelty. The effect was electrical. A gentleman, a scholar, an orator, he had something to recommend him to every class. His labours were all

gratuitous. He might be mad, but it was difficult to prove or believe him to be mercenary. God was with him in a wonderful manner. In the brief space of four years he established the incredible number of about *three hundred* societies or churches in South Wales. Three clergymen, just as they were wanted, left the Established Church, joined the followers of Harris, and took the lead among them in all matters ecclesiastical. Things now proceeded much in the same way as in Scotland during the Reformation. These excellent ministers "became itinerants through the whole country, and many arose, of different degrees of usefulness, to exhort the people, some of very bright talents, and others who preached occasionally, so that the country became greatly moved. The people forsook their sinful pleasures and began to converse about religion, and to meet together as religious assemblies. Thus a great revival took place in the country, and from that period to the present, the knowledge of God has been wonderfully diffused through Wales, and multitudes who were never accustomed to approach a chapel, and seldom a church, now went gladly to hear the word, to dwelling-houses, yea even to the highways and hedges." *

Mr. Harris began his career in 1735, and in 1742 we find him supported by no fewer than ten clergymen and full forty lay preachers; and the land was filled with tokens of the Divine approbation in the happy fruits resulting from their toils. The chief disapprovers were the carnal clergy and the bishop, who, nevertheless, most essentially served the cause by his treatment of the Rev.

* Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn mhlith y Cymry, tu dal. 53.

William Williams. Mr. Williams had obtained deacon's orders, and ministered in the Establishment during three years; but the bishop refused to admit him to "full orders" by ordaining him a priest, "because of his *disorderly* conduct in preaching in unconsecrated places." Mr. Williams made short work of it. In 1743 he left the Church of England. He was the first clergyman in Wales who set the noble example. It is a remarkable fact, that, for twelve years, Howell Harris and his people did not erect a single chapel. Private houses, school-rooms, barns, grass fields, and the mountain side, sufficed for their apostolic labours all that period. In 1747 their first chapel was erected at Builth in Brecknockshire. They have now upwards of six hundred places of worship. Behold the effect of lay preaching! This well-compacted, well-governed, and most prosperous denomination, originated in lay labour; it has been augmented, and it is now upheld and sustained to a great extent by lay labour, in various forms, to which we shall have occasion subsequently to refer. But for Harris and his coadjutors, what would still have been the condition of Wales? Ever since the Reformation, what has she owed to her bishops and clergy? What have their learning, ordination, and "regularity," done for her poor perishing mountaineers? The Welsh have themselves pronounced a judgment, by the steps they have taken, by the preference they have shewn. The bishops are abandoned, and their clergy are little other than a body of sinecurists. In no country has lay agency been employed more abundantly, or with greater safety and comfort; and in no country have its efforts been more triumphant.

SECTION IV.

OF THE BENEFITS WHICH HAVE RESULTED FROM LAY AGENCY IN FOREIGN PARTS.

WHEREVER the Gospel of Christ has been proclaimed with effect among the heathen, it has uniformly created an overpowering necessity of employing lay agency, and in every case, the success, which has created the necessity, has supplied it. A careful and candid perusal of Missionary records will beget a uniform and irresistible conviction, that the religion of the New Testament, in a vigorous and healthful state, contains an inherent principle of self-propagation, and that this principle always embodies itself in some shape or form of lay agency. Those records will also shew, that this agency has sprung up among ardent converts in every stage of civilization, and in every rank of life—that it has been found impossible to extinguish this principle in the breasts of such converts—and that the difficulty of repression has been great in proportion as the party has been removed from the restraints of artificial manners, from sectarian obstructions, and from the paralyzing influence of those corrupt and antichristian exhibitions of religion, which are still prevalent among the nations of Europe. We shall now present our illustrations chronologically as they have occurred since the time of the Reformation.

1.—*The Dutch*, having taken Ceylon, in the year 1658, set themselves to evangelize it. They divided their territory into 240 parishes, in each of which they instituted public worship and established a school. To supply the requisite agency, they immediately formed a seminary for training native teachers, catechists, and preachers. The same building sufficed for Sabbath worship and week-day instruction. To meet the wants of these 240 parishes, there was a small body of clergymen, varying from twelve to fifteen. This fearful deficiency was, however, supplied by calling in the aid of the catechists and schoolmasters, by whose means worship was maintained in every congregation.*

2.—The *Anglo-Americans* furnish some early and beautiful illustrations. In the year 1642, a few English families settled at Great Harbour, on the island of Martha's Vineyard. They chose one of themselves, Mr. Mayhew, jun., an intelligent and pious man, to act as a sort of pastor to them. In addition to the care of his humble charge, Mayhew redeemed an occasional hour from business, when he preached to a few of the Indians. His first convert among these sons of the desert was Hiacoomes. His generous labours ultimately issued in the establishment of an Indian congregation, among whom Hiacoomes conducted the worship on Lord's-day, while he himself visited them periodically in the course of the week. Hiacoomes came to Mr. Mayhew every Saturday, when he was directed in the choice of texts, and furnished with materials for their illustration. For three years after his conversion, however, Hiacoomes only instructed

* Baldeus.

his neighbours in private, but in 1646, he commenced public preaching. From this time the work spread rapidly in the hands of Mayhew and Hiacoomes. The Indians flocked to them in whole families, and a spirit of inquiry broke forth among the tribes; so great indeed was the increase, that it became necessary to have two congregations on the Sabbath, and to establish a school for young men and children. Mayhew sailed for England to plead the cause of the Indians, but neither ship nor crew were ever more heard of. On this dreadful day, the hope of the Indians seemed to expire. They fully appreciated their heavy loss. For many years the mention of his name drew tears from the eyes of men unaccustomed to weep, and who had been used to laugh in the midst of torture.

This melancholy event led to the finest exhibition of lay agency, that modern times have seen. Thomas Mayhew, Esq., the father, patentee of this and the adjacent islands, though most hearty in the cause, had hitherto taken no active hand in the instruction of the Indians. Now, however, he determined to fill the breach created, in Providence, by the premature death of his excellent son. Although threescore years and ten, he set himself to learn the language, and straightway commenced preaching to these friendless men, sometimes travelling a distance of fifteen, and even twenty miles, through the woods, to visit them. Heaven smiled upon the efforts of the hoary preacher so abundantly, that, in 1674, there were in Martha's Vineyard the incredible multitude of "fifteen hundred praying Indians, ten Indian lay preachers, two ordained Indian pastors, and six separate meetings every

Sabbath-day." This ancient man extended his evangelical labours to Nantucket, an island about twenty miles distant, where also a church of Christian Indians was collected, and about 300 persons observed the Sabbath, and engaged in exercises of devotion. They, too, had meetings in three different places, and four Indian lay preachers. The veteran evangelist died in 1680, in the ninety-third year of his age, and the twenty-third of his lay ministry, beloved and mourned by all the inhabitants of the island.

The Rev. J. Catton, pastor of a church at Plymouth Colony, feeling for the Indians, learned their language, and preached every week to five Indian congregations, which were superintended by native brethren, who conducted their worship on the Sabbath-days, and were of signal use to Mr. Catton in carrying on the work of God. Mr. Treat, of Eastham, about the same time, preached to four assemblies of Indians collected from different villages, in the vicinity of Cape Cod. These congregations were, otherwise, entirely under the ministry and management of native lay preachers, who, like Hiacoomes, made a weekly visit to Mr. Treat for texts and tuition on the subjects of their ministrations.

3.—The *Danes* are entitled to distinction for their judicious employment of lay agency in Tranquebar. By the time the mission was fairly established, no fewer than twenty-four of the native converts were employed in promoting the cause. The result of this agency, led on by a very few missionaries, was a harvest of more than 8,000 converts, inclusive of their baptised children. In 1750, the immortal Swartz arrived among them. This great

missionary entertained the most exalted opinion of the importance of lay agency. He devoted a large portion of his time to the preparation of it. His mission-house was, in point of fact, a Mission College, where converts were laboriously trained for local and itinerant preaching. He daily assembled all his catechists and preachers within reach, when he taught them not only what to say to their countrymen, but also *how* to say it, in the best manner; and after prayer, he dismissed them to their labours. In this respect, Swartz has left a most impressive example to all his successors in the field of missions.

4. The *Moravians* are, up to this hour, the most thoroughly missionary body in the world. Their achievements in Greenland and Labrador, and their primary movements in the West Indies, will be remembered with admiration to the latest times. Their plan is perfect; all they want is numbers and pecuniary means. The pivot on which their success has mainly turned, has been the skill with which they have worked and wielded the agency of their converts. They were the first missionaries by whom it was reduced to a system; that system will be detailed in a subsequent chapter. For the present it sufficeth to say, that their people are completely organised, and that lay assistants, both male and female, constitute every where their principal and most efficient agency.

In Greenland the labours of the converts contributed far more to the furtherance of the Gospel than those of the brethren. Acting at one time as the brethren's assistants, at another as their substitutes, and at another going forth as itinerant companions of the wandering

hordes, they everywhere helped on the undertaking. The annual summer dispersion of the congregation was a Gospel spring, a sacred seed-time, when the converts sowed the seed of the kingdom far beyond the locality occupied by the brethren, and thus extended the work of God.*

But perhaps the brethren never more fully experienced the value, or reaped the benefit of this agency, than at the outset of their labours in the West Indies. When they had failed to establish a mission at St. Croix, and had abandoned it, certain negroes, converts of the brethren at the island of St. Thomas, who had been transferred to St. Croix, began to preach the word to their fellow-slaves, which laid the solid foundation of the subsequent mission. Brother C. G. Israel went and formed a church among them, and laboured for a time with great success; but, after his departure, the island was again left without a missionary. Then it was that the negro church felt the benefit of order, organization, and lay agency. The negro assistants' labours were of signal service as a substitute for a regular pastorship.

In North America, too, the work was most effectually promoted by the agency of the converts, who, in point of language, and in many other respects, had great advantage over the brethren. In many cases the missionaries were incompetent to endure even the physical exertion required. The people could never have enough of the great truth, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." The Indian assistants were often occu-

* Crantz, vol. ii. pp. 6—11, et passim.

pied, till past midnight, repeating and explaining the "great words" of the missionary.

The brethren owed not less to lay agency in their South American labours. In fact, the truth was first proclaimed amongst the Arawack Indians by a native youth; and such as heard him, took up the "report," and spread it abroad among their countrymen. Nor was this all; when, afterwards, the brethren were prevented from itinerating in the country, and the Christian Indians dispersed by cruel necessity, they diffused the knowledge of Christ to an extent far beyond the sphere of the missionaries' labours.

5.—The *Wesleyan Methodists,* who have copied much from the Moravian machinery, supply an abundance of splendid examples, from the missionary field, of the unutterable importance of lay agency. Our selection shall be from the West Indies—that land of cruelty and sorrow, where Methodism has gained no mean measure of its principal glories.

Nathanael Gilbert, Esq. Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua, on a visit to England, was brought to a knowledge of the truth. He used his best endeavours, but without success, to get a preacher to accompany him to the West Indies. Disappointed in his object, on his return, he began to speak of the Saviour in his own house to such as chose to attend; and, finding his attempts encouraged, he afterwards preached in public to both the white people and the negroes. The result was, the formation of a society upon Wesleyan principles, comprising about two hundred members, over whom he

watched with the anxiety of a parent. This illustrious lay preacher soon departed this life, an event which gave occasion to display the marvellously conservative character of Wesleyan Methodism. It is a fact, all but incredible, that the Church was kept together, under circumstances the most adverse, by the mere force of its discipline, for about twenty years; and, that the chief agents in the administration of that discipline were two negresses, who instructed and edified the society by their prayers, and preserved among them the forms of the system in respect of classes and of order. What a lesson of instruction is here supplied!

At length they received help from Heaven in the person of John Baxter, who had come out from England to work as a carpenter in the dock of English Harbour, in Antigua. He had been a leader in a Wesleyan Society at Chatham, and had become familiar with the practical working of Methodism. He at once, as far as his business at the dock would permit, assumed the management of Mr. Gilbert's Society. To them his Sabbaths were wholly devoted, and, on the week nights, when his labour was done, he hired a horse and rode about, frequently a distance of ten or twelve miles, to the different plantations to instruct and exhort the slaves. The word spread like fire; congregations grew apace, and many were turned to God. Baxter was equal to his position; he rose with the occasion; and, with the contributions of his black brethren, he soon built a chapel. Meanwhile, he received most material aid from an old Irish emigrant, who had belonged to the Methodists in the Emerald Isle. This venerable man was familiar with the routine of the Society,

and proved a great acquisition to Baxter. The result of these labours was, that, in the space of eight years, he had under his spiritual care nearly two thousand souls, chiefly negroes. Nor was this all; many new places were opened, and requests made for preaching, with which he found it impossible to comply. At this time Dr. Coke arrived, and with him a supply of missionaries. What an illustration of the value and importance of lay agency is here again presented!

We cannot withhold the case of Harry, a slave, of St. Eustatius. He had been a member of the Methodist Society in America, and, on being transferred to the island of St. Eustatius, he began to preach to his companions in bondage. The effect was such as followed Wesley's preaching, at the commencement of his marvellous career. "Many fell down as if they were dead, and some remained in a state of stupor for several hours. Sixteen persons were thus seized in one night; the alarm spread, and the report reached the ears of the governor, who issued an order, forbidding Harry to preach any more." Harry, in the simplicity of his heart, ceased to *preach*, but continued to pray with the people. For this he was publicly whipped, imprisoned, and banished from the island. Harry, however, before this, had kindled fires which none could extinguish. The work went on prosperously in secret class meetings, in spite of the blind fury of the Dutch governor. The Christian negroes held and attended their class meetings with the utmost regularity; and, notwithstanding the edict of prohibition, Dr. Coke, on his arrival with missionaries, found no fewer than *eight exhorters* among them!

Methodism in America—now a prodigious structure—was founded by lay preachers. Philip Embury, an Irishman, who had been a local preacher in his native country, on settling in America, collected a few of his neighbours, first in his own house, and addressed them; and the numbers increasing, he met them in a large room. In 1768, a society was formed, and means adopted to erect a chapel. Such was the beginning of a body which now fills the land. Another fact, connected with American Methodism, merits notice:—When the revolutionary war broke out, five of the English regular itinerants, sent over by Wesley, were compelled to flee for their lives, and the sixth hid himself two whole years in the house of a friend. But the societies lived, and the word of the living God could neither be banished nor bound. The native lay preachers fed the fires of Methodism, which blazed on, and spread, on every hand, diffusing the light of life amid the carnage and confusion, the horrors and dismay, of that fearful era! Amidst overwhelming difficulties, the work advanced, and, within the space of nine years, from the foundation of the first society, they numbered no fewer than forty itinerants, and probably one hundred local preachers, with 7000 members, exclusive of negroes.

6.—The *Baptists* have contributed their full share of sanction and support to this species of agency, in connection with missions. The East Indies have been the principal sphere of their labours and glory, notwithstanding they have also reaped distinguished laurels by their labours in the West; but it is not generally known that lay agency preceded them, and paved their way to the empire of the East. John Thomas, a name that will long

live, sailed to Bengal in 1783, as surgeon of the Oxford, East Indiaman, and, immediately on his reaching its idolatrous shores, he attempted the formation of a plan for the spread of the Gospel. His project, however, failed. Returning to London, he embraced Baptist views, and being immersed, he began to exhort in private societies, and also to preach in different places in and around the metropolis. In 1786, he sailed a second time for Bengal, as surgeon of the same ship, when, meeting with some pious persons, he agreed to hold a prayer meeting, and to preach to them every Lord's-day. His labours were useful and acceptable, and he was induced, by the force of much entreaty, to leave the ship and remain in the country to preach the Gospel. He continued from 1787 to 1792, busily engaged in preaching the Word, learning the language, and translating the Scriptures. Having completed Matthew and Mark, the Epistle of James, part of Genesis, portions of the Psalms and Prophets, he returned to England. In this and the other parts of his history, the finger of God was signally visible. Ignorant of the awakening spirit of his denomination, and the adoption of arrangements, at that moment, to form a Missionary Society for India, he came home, that he might endeavour to establish a fund in London for sending missionaries to India, and to procure a suitable fellow-labourer to return with him. In the October of this year, 1792, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed. Mr. Thomas having just returned, at the critical moment, like another Joshua, after spying out the land, rehearsed to them his operations and his objects. He was the very man they wanted, and beyond any other

individual of their own, or of any other denomination, possessed the various accomplishments which the work required. He returned to India under their auspices, with the celebrated Carey, as his colleague in the missionary field. The future Ecclesiastical historians of that country will record the sequel.

The celebrated band of Serampore have, from the first, entertained the most enlightened views upon this subject. "If," say they, "the practice of *confining the ministry of the Word to a single individual in a church,* be once established amongst us, we despair of the Gospel's ever making much progress in India by our means. Let us, therefore, use every gift, and continually urge on our native brethren to press upon their countrymen the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." The missionaries worked out their principle with admirable skill, so that the bulk of the brethren, of the native churches, constituted a body of lay agents in spreading the Gospel. In fact, they were the chief immediate means of the increase of the churches. Most of the conversions were to be ascribed to them. When a number of the natives were thus disciplined in usefulness, the missionaries proceeded to employ the more gifted of them in a more systematic manner, and on a more extended scale. Much of the work among the Baptists in India, must, therefore, be set down to the credit of lay labour.

7.—The *London Missionary Society,* though last, is not least, in this bright roll. They have much to record on the subject. The history of their achievements in the South Seas is one unbroken narrative of the successful efforts of laymen in uprooting idolatry and turning multi-

tudes to God. We shall adduce the testimony of two of its most honoured instruments.

The secretary of the society declares, that "The islanders have shewn the great principle of the Gospel to be one of self-propagation, and the spirit it implants to be one of self-consecration. No sooner did they themselves understand the Gospel, and feel its power in their own hearts, than the prayer was offered up, that God would graciously have compassion on the ignorant around; and efforts were made for the purpose of communicating to them that knowledge which they themselves possessed. In addition to this, they came forward, expressing their readiness to go and tell others of the name of Jesus, and point them to the Lamb of God. It is a pleasing fact, that there is no group of islands, within about three or four thousand miles of Tahiti, now favoured with the light of the Gospel, which has not, in part, if not altogether, been thus visited through the instrumentality of the Christians of those islands. The Paumotu or Palliser, the Marquesas, the Austral, the Harvey, and the Navigators' Islands, have received the Gospel through their labours. They assisted in introducing Christianity into the Sandwich Islands, and were the pioneers of our Wesleyan brethren in the Friendly and Fiji Islands. God has eminently honoured the native Christians as the means of diffusing the Gospel far and wide amongst the nations of the Pacific." *

That great missionary, John Williams, corroborates Ellis, and says, "I do not know, that the inhabitants of any island, with the exception of those of Tahiti, have

* Ellis' Address in the Missionary Farewell.

been converted to Christianity by the instrumentality of English missionaries; the work has been done by native missionaries. Of course, they are conveyed by us, and are under our direction and superintendence; but they are the men that do the work, and, therefore, it is of the utmost importance that this agency, which God has put into our hands, should be carried on in the most judicious, the most effective, and the most extensive way, in which it is possible to conduct it."* These remarkable testimonies to the uniform efficiency and stupendous effects of lay agency, in the South Seas, constitute illustrations of our principle which it is hardly possible to surpass. There is, however, one more illustrative fact, of interest so great to the Dissenters of England, that we cannot withhold it.

Andries Stoffles, the Hottentot, was a man, probably, not inferior to any convert of any mission of modern times. His visit to England will be long remembered; but his name and actions in Africa will never be forgotten. Having been turned from darkness to light, Stoffles at once testified of the grace of God to those around him, manifesting the utmost anxiety for the salvation of his fellow-men. His conversations, prayers, and exhortations made a deep impression upon all who heard them. Often were whole assemblies of natives and Europeans melted into tears, when he spoke of the love of Christ. His words were not lost—his wife and many of his relatives followed him to the cross of Christ.

Shortly after his conversion, a magistrate, residing at a distance from Bethelsdorp, applied to the station for a

* Williams' Address in the Missionary Farewell.

few men to assist in the public works. Stoffles volunteered to go; but, on arriving in the locality, he at once began to preach, with overpowering effect, to the Hottentots and slaves. There was much weeping, and it was said he would "drive all the people mad." He was commanded to desist, but Stoffles said he could not hold his tongue, and he was consequently sent to prison; but the prisoners were numerous, and Stoffles began preaching to them with similar effects, so that the only alternative was to release him and send him back to Bethelsdorp.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE EVILS INCIDENT TO LAY AGENCY, WITH THEIR CAUSES.

It must be confessed, and, with all our enthusiasm in its behalf, we have no wish to deny, that there are evils incident to the employment of lay agency; nor can it be denied or concealed, that there are also evils incident to clerical agency, or to that of ordained ministers. It is likewise certain, that the mischiefs resulting from the latter, have been a thousand-fold more extended, general, permanent, and fatal than those which have resulted from the former, accompanied also by the bitter aggravation, that, while these have been gratuitous, those have cost mankind innumerable millions. What then is to be inferred from these indisputable facts? The inference is this, that, in either case, the evil is not *necessarily* attendant on the agency. This circumstance has seldom been considered, and lay agency has been indiscriminately run down as a pestilent nuisance. Indeed, the inquiry respecting it must be conducted to great disadvantage on the crowded theatre of England, darkened with a cloud of

of prejudices against it, and teeming with obstructions to its fair exercise, from the pride of sects and the jealousy of ecclesiastical orders. The question can no where be so successfully and satisfactorily discussed as on the field of missions. The subject, viewed from a distant point, is more clearly seen, and the experiment, conducted on that field, is made with greater fairness. As the Christian labourer approaches an apostolic position, he naturally acquires an apostolic spirit, and becomes prepared for the adoption of apostolic practice. Now we make our confident appeal to the whole literature of modern missions, and boldly assert, that not a single sentence has therein been recorded of dissatisfaction with the principle or the practice of lay agency. We look in vain for a whisper of complaint, disappointment, or vexation arising from it. Surely some weight should be attached to such a circumstance. May it not be hence inferred, that the evils arise from special, external, and accidental causes, rather than from any thing inherent in the principle or the agency? May it not hence, too, be suspected, that the evils have been, in some measure, aggravated? There is one body of British Christians, the Methodists, to whom attention is due when they speak on the subject. Theirs is the voice of experience, and their experiment has been carried forward, upon the largest scale, through a period of one hundred years. An authority of the highest order, a prophet of their own, the late Richard Watson, declares, that "the number and magnitude of the evils anticipated, are often much magnified, and the remedy is nearer and more effectual than has been allowed."* This witness is true.

* Watson's Works, vol. viii p. 287.

It ought, likewise, to be remembered, that lay agency, in its most dangerous forms, and its most ungovernable measure, has, generally, been the attendant only of great and wide-spread revivals of religion. To this condition of things, therefore, our subsequent statements must be understood as more especially referring and applying, rather than to the ordinary and every-day aspect of the churches; although, with proper abatements, they hold true of individuals in all churches at all times.

SECT. I.

OF THE EVILS INCIDENT TO LAY AGENCY.

THE question of evils is one of very wide extent; it embraces divers parties and interests, and a multiplicity of considerations. The chief of these, however, may be ranged under the following heads:—

The *first class* of evils regards the *agents themselves.* It is not insinuated, that these apply to all agents, at all times, or at any time, or, that they adhere to all affected by them, to the same extent. But it is affirmed and maintained, that, in many cases which have occurred both in ordinary and extraordinary times, the character we are now to describe is not a fiction but a reality, which falls far short of the truth.

Lay agents may be considered, in the main, to consist

of three sorts:—First, the wise and prudent, much the smallest number, who are generally, from over-diffidence, or a too keen sense of propriety, averse to the employment, but singularly useful when they can be induced to engage in it. Second, the empty, the vain, and the forward, who run unsent, and can seldom be restrained; these men, bad at the beginning, as they proceed, become worse, and are the primary source of most of the evils justly charged against this agency. And Third, the well-meaning, uninstructed, and inexperienced, who are, notwithstanding, full of promise, and, under proper training and discipline, may become estimable, useful, and efficient labourers. This third sort, however, instead of being improved, are frequently deteriorated in spirit, character, and worth, to a most lamentable extent. By degrees, they suffer in the grace of humility, in a manner so marked and rapid, as to alarm their best friends. The fatal decay advances, till this loveliest of the graces disappears, and is succeeded by incipient vanity. This disgusting substitute strengthens, by little and little, till it has given a new aspect to the whole air, manners, and character. Spirituality and simplicity retire apace, and give way to their hateful opposites. Self-sufficiency next advances with hasty steps, seizes the helm, and guides the whole. They now become captious, censorious, and soon aspire to fill the critic's chair. Their solid, intellectual, and moral improvement, is now at an end. They are already wiser than seven men that can render a reason. They become increasingly liberal in the distribution of their wisdom and opinions to all who will receive them. This unhappy deterioration of character receives its last finish, from a

settled indifference to the established means of grace and knowledge. They are now instructors, and to remain disciples were to incur a suspicion of imperfection, and it is felt to be a degradation. If they were attendants on a pastor's Bible class, they withdraw; they are teachers themselves, and consider it beneath them to remain in the attitude or society of learners. The same principle soon extends to the house of God. They are frequently but half-day hearers. They can "profit more at home."—Awful as this may seem, it has been often realized. The great commentator, Scott, declaring his own opinion of such men, asserts, that lay exercises rendered those who engaged in them "so contemptuously indifferent to the worship of God at the church, and, indeed, many of them, to *any* public worship, in which they did not take a part, that I never before or since witnessed any thing like it." This was at Olney, where Scott was preceded by Newton. He further observes of the effect of these exercises, that "they produced a captious, criticising, self-wise spirit," respecting preachers, "so that even Mr. Newton himself could seldom please them;" and that these things had no small effect in "leading him to leave Olney."* As a haughty spirit cometh before a fall, and pride before destruction, so this course often terminates in shipwreck of the faith, and loss of character.—Such is the picture; and it has been often realized. This sore evil, however, does not terminate with the unhappy man himself; it extends to all around, and is the chief source of the class of evils next to be set forth.

The *second class* of evils regards pastors and churches.

* Life of Scott, p. 518.

Sooner or later, the pastor's preaching becomes a favourite theme of discussion with the party just described. "It is all wrong; any thing but what it should be; before it can be useful, or ought to be acceptable, it must be wholly changed." The leaven goes on fermenting among the weak, the untaught, and the unstable. They, too, now begin to find out that *they* are not "profited;" the pastor's preaching is "very deficient, indeed!" The first stage of this Korah's success is with his own family and connections, the less intelligent portion of whom he generally succeeds to detach from the pastor, and to enlist against him. A party is, ultimately, formed, and he, as the lay functionary, becomes the leader. In all church affairs, he must be a chief mover; in all church meetings, a principal speaker. He soon erects himself into a species of *tribune*, to "protect" the people against the encroachments of the pastor, the deacons, and the "aristocracy." In due time, the peace of the church is broken; and one of two events occurs—he, with his party, either overthrows the minister, and forces on his removal; or, by timely and vigorous steps, he is discomfitted, and then he secedes with his faction, and perhaps meditates measures of further mischief. In the great majority of instances, however, he remains a thorn in the pastor's side, and a permanent marplot to the church's peace.

The *third class* of evils regards partly the church, but principally the world. In this case fanaticism, and Antinomianism, and other errors, spread on the one hand; disgust and contempt prevail on the other, and infidelity reaps the fruit. This has repeatedly occurred, to an extent which has made mankind stand aghast. Matters

have never come to this pass, however, unless in connection with revivals of religion, of great depth and power, when the foundations of things have been shaken, and salutary order, for want of proper management, has been subverted by the momentary tempest which has swept over the face of the churches. In such cases, too, the most lamentable results have flowed from the best intentions. "A few, perhaps, who were deeply impressed with the importance of religion, and with the danger of the impenitently wicked, began, without permission, to give vent to their honest zeal in warm public addresses. Those whose zeal and knowledge were less, and whose vanity was greater, soon imitated the example, until *lay preaching* became prevalent, and extravagance and folly were the most prominent features of the scene."* It is only at times of great excitement, that a crop of lay agents, thick and strong, "arises in a night," and in a day overspreads the church. The era of the Reformation supplies a multitude of painful facts to illustrate the subject. From this abuse, arose the darkest stains that dimmed the lustre of that mighty work. It was a dismal day which listened to the promulgation of such an oracle as this—"That every Christian was invested with a power to preach the Gospel, and, consequently, that the church stood in no need of ministers or pastors, and that God still continued to reveal his will to chosen persons by dreams and visions."† Such views as these but too surely indicated the approach of that swelling tide of delusion, enthusiasm, fanaticism, and insanity, which spread

* Dr. Miller's Letter to Dr. Sprague..

† Mosheim, cap. iii. cent. xvii.

such consternation among the friends of the Reformation from Popery.

In the earlier part of the eighteenth century, when it pleased God to visit the churches in Great Britain and America with the special outpourings of his Holy Spirit, as in the days of Luther, the tares speedily appeared among the wheat. Of this mixture there was, for a season, an ample abundance in England, and the evils which arose from the indiscretion and incapacity of lay preachers were general and great, although the good resulting from their labours exceedingly predominated over the evil, and survived it. But in America, these evils were much greater, much more extensive, and of more protracted duration, and the good, in proportion, much less. In that new country, there was but a small amount of those checks, and salutary obstructions, which England presented. Not simply an insurrectionary, but a revolutionary spirit, in Divine things, burst forth like a whirlwind, and distracted the States from the one end to the other. Whitefield, Edwards, Stoddard, the Tennents, and others—the mighty instruments of the good—were feeble as infancy in stemming the torrent of the evil. So serious did matters become, that "the disorders of *lay preaching* well nigh brought the ministry in many places into contempt."* Mr. Davenport, who presumed to ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm, launched the elements of discord into the country, and went far to ruin the work of God in the land. He everywhere and "earnestly encouraged his new converts to speak in public, and brought forward a multitude of ignorant and unqualified persons, young

* Dr. Miller.

and old, to address large assemblies, in his own vehement and magisterial manner. He taught his followers to govern themselves by impulses and impressions, rather than by the written word." * He "encouraged bodies of people, in a number of places, to withdraw from their pastors, and to establish separate societies, in which all his peculiarities and extravagancies might be freely indulged; scattered division and strife in every direction; increased the number of the enemies of the revival, discouraged and disgusted not a few of its friends, and, in a word, created disorders, alienation, bitterness, and division, the consequences of which remain in many parts of that country to the present day." † Such is the awful warning which the voice of history directs to the churches in after-times; but the warning, with regard to some sections of the church, has been given in vain.

One of the most affecting illustrations of unqualified and unrestrained lay preaching, that has taken place in our times, occurred in the beginning of the present century. A mighty revival of the work of God began in Logan County, in Kentucky, which soon spread over all that, and thence into the neighbouring states. The work continued through a period of nearly three years, but was at length overshadowed, disgraced, and terminated by fanaticism and disorder, of the most afflictive description. The whole was attended with a variety of the most deplorable irregularities. An intense passion for excitement and for agitation took possession of men. These were identified with religion, and when absent, it was held, that no good was either received or imparted. A number of

* Dr. Miller. † Ibid.

hot-headed young men, intoxicated with the prevailing element of excitement, and feeling confident of their own powers, and call to the work, though entirely destitute of any suitable education, assumed the office of public exhorters and instructors. In a weak and fatal moment, the majority of the Presbytery conceived it prudent and politic to stay the tide of innovation by divesting them of their *lay* character, and ordaining them regularly to the ministry, forgetting, to all appearance, that ordination would leave both the head and the heart untouched, and in no way increase qualification, however it might diminish irregularity. The door was now opened, and to close it was found difficult, if not impossible. A shoal of successive candidates, on the same plan, were licensed, and afterwards ordained, until this class of ignorant and impetuous men threatened to become a majority of the whole body of ministers. The hour of retribution was drawing on. All error is related; and the transition from error in one point to error in another, is natural and easy. A number of these raw and illiterate young men, and some of their older abettors, began to manifest great laxity respecting theological opinions. In a word, the mischief advanced, till the "Confession of Faith" became a dead letter, and "persons of all conceivable sentiments might freely enter at such a door."* The plague was stayed only by the extreme measure of separating all such from the Synod of Kentucky. The intruders, with their adherents so separated, comprised a very great multitude of congregations. The majority of them formed the body now known as the "Cumberland Presbyterians," who avowedly embrace

* Dr. Miller.

semi-pelagian doctrines. Another but similar portion formed a new body, denominated "New Lights," or "Stoneites," and became a sort of enthusiastic, noisy Socinians; while the remainder, under the same lawless impulse, took a third course, and fell into all the fanatical absurdities of "Shakerism."

But the matter did not end with havoc in the church; its effects upon the world, likewise, were every way disastrous. Corruption, and division, and alienation of the once sound materials for ecclesiastical organization, and the addition of an enormous mass that was wholly rotten, was only a part of the evil. These things generated a bitter hostility among many of the faithful, to all revivals of religion, while they nourished and cherished a systematic, bold, and wide-spread infidelity.*

These facts illustrate our point upon a large scale, by which it becomes more clear and palpable. They have also the important advantage of being placed at a distance from us, both of time and space, and they thus stand a better chance of being candidly considered. It must, however, be observed, that the brief description here tendered, falls much short of the fearful reality. It is to be noted, too, that we have not gone abroad for want of examples at home. The history of religion in England supplies abundance of cases, no doubt of a character less aggravated, but still such as to illustrate the imminent perils of this agency, when without proper preparation and proper government. The ecclesiastical history of

* See Prince's History; Trumbull's History of Connecticut; Bishop's Outline of the History of the Church in Kentucky; and Dr. Miller's Letter.

Scotland, also, furnishes ample materials for argument and illustration, for caution and admonition, upon this subject. The Scottish Independents made a very remarkable experiment in regard to it, and the empire may profit from their example. Their success, upon the whole, has been great; but they, too, have, like others, been very negligent of those preparations and precautions which are so essential to the uniformly safe, satisfactory, and successful employment of lay agency. But it is time to inquire into the causes of these things.

SECTION II.

OF THE CAUSES OF THE EVILS INCIDENT TO LAY AGENCY.

The causes of these evils may be ascertained with sufficient certainty for the purpose of correction. They are various, and such as reflect little honour either upon churches or the clergy. These causes may be arranged under four classes.

The *first cause* has consisted in the imperfect recognition of the principle by Christian churches. Such agency has, in most cases, been viewed less in the light of an ecclesiastical element than of an excrescence. Their obligations to shine as collective bodies, or as individuals, have been very feebly realized. Their feeling seems to

have been, that it is their province rather to enjoy good than to impart it; that the business of sowing the seed of the kingdom, and saving souls, was no concern of theirs; and that all these things were clerical considerations and duties. Hence no provision is, nor has it ever been, made by the bulk, either of the churches, as such, for the employment, the culture, or the countenance of lay agency, or by those, their pastors, to whom it rightfully belongs. It is again our felicity to refer, on this point, to Richard Watson; speaking of the Wesleyans, he says:—"We have a large subordinate agency at work in every part of the kingdom, and, in most cases, with the greatest benefit to the cause of true religion; but its lasting benefit and efficiency consist in its connection with the order, discipline, and direction of a Christian church. Those powers are vested in its ministers. They must rise with this auxiliary agency, and work with it. To them belong the careful cultivation of ministerial talent, and ministerial zeal, and devotion—learning, at least in a few, sound Biblical knowledge and powerful and instructive preaching in all—and an ever-active and wakeful zeal prompting every subordinate agency, and, by the legitimate influence resulting from office, gifts, and graces, at once maintaining it in activity, and giving to it its right and safe direction."*

In this luminous passage, the principle of lay labour, as a part of the Methodistical economy, is fairly expounded. This at once accounts for their almost uniform success in the application of lay power, and for the almost uniform failure of other bodies. It has generally no "connection

* Watson's Works, vol. viii. p. 289.

with the order, discipline, and direction," of Congregational churches, as "powers vested in their ministers." This is one of the rocks, on which they have uniformly split, with respect to this great question. Nay, in fact, speaking generally, the agency is held in very small repute amongst them; and it is by many apparently deemed a thing even of doubtful honour to be employed in this way. It is something quite beneath the members of the superior and better cultivated families. It would almost be felt, by the members of such families, that a father, or a brother, or a son, was degraded by the function of a lay preacher. Alas! few or none are taught to look forward to it as a high and honourable distinction, and an eminent means of advancing the cause of God. The majority view it with an evil eye, and feel much more inclined to hinder than to help it forward. Thus the intelligence, the rank, and the lay learning of Congregational churches, have stood aloof; and many of those influences, which must have powerfully tended to abate the evil, and to augment the good, of this agency, have been withdrawn or withheld.

The *second cause* has consisted in the ignorance of one, in the indolence of another, in the imbecility of a third, the pride of a fourth, and the jealousy of a fifth, among the clergy.

Clerical *ignorance* has had more than a little to do with the failure of lay agency, and the evils which have arisen from it. When we speak of ignorance, however, we do not refer to any one denomination, country, or period; for the evil has been, unhappily, more extensive both as to time and to place—and neither do we refer so much to the times passing over us as to those which have gone by.

Our illustrations of the evils have been taken from the past, and we must, therefore, look to the past for their contemporaneous causes; and among those causes most assuredly pastoral ignorance was one, and not the least. The influence of the pastoral office will prove but a feeble barrier apart from the influence of the pastoral character. Ignorance, on the one hand, and intelligent respect, on the other, are incompatible; and contempt for the character is speedily followed by contempt for the office. Liberties are seldom taken, till it is felt that they can be taken with impunity; and till it is almost believed that rebellion has become a duty. No small portion of those who have groaned under the real or feigned affliction of lay preachers, have been men of this description, and have been chiefly the authors of their own calamity. Under pastors of another stamp, such preachers would have acted with propriety, and in due observance of proper order. Such men have also sounded many a false alarm against lay agency. In not a few cases, the danger has been imaginary, having no other foundation than their own fears. As knowledge is power, so they have felt ignorance to be weakness; they have been filled with self-distrust, and have lived in hourly dread of aggression. Much of the horror which still obtains, respecting lay preaching, is to be traced to those men's dark suspicions, and terrified imaginations. On this point we speak what we partly know, and testify what we have often seen. If laymen are to be useful, they must be intelligent; and he who is to wield with effect the agency of such laymen, must be himself a man of intelligence—a man of solid and ample information—and a man whose worth and

wisdom are such as gain by close inspection. If it be otherwise, he can neither teach nor govern; and if he cannot do both, the less he has to do with lay agency the better. One chief reason of the uniform success of this agency abroad, is, the unquestionable, the immeasurable superiority of the missionaries to their lay auxiliaries. At home, too, the pastor must confessedly stand high above, and walk far ahead of all his helpers, else he is undone.

Clerical *Indolence* is also another cause of those evils. The old-fashioned, measured, and mathematical ministry, looked on lay agency, generally, and especially on *lay preaching*, as something more than a vagary—as a dangerous innovation, a pestiferous irregularity. Such, too, as viewed it with less alarm, and in a somewhat different light, as an abstract point, yet felt disturbed by it when reduced to practice. It put them out of their way—it broke up their system—it was an annoyance, a nuisance. They could not be troubled with it. It required provision for a systematic course of laborious instruction to the agents, but they "must mind their studies." It required, according to Watson's most just description, "an ever-active and wakeful zeal prompting it," and "at once maintaining it in activity, and giving to it its right and safe direction." But all this was foreign to their fixed, lazy, or literary habits. Sometimes they have, under fits of zeal, thought it rather a good thing; and sometimes they have not been able to satisfy themselves as to its possible tendencies. Upon the whole, they have come to this conclusion, that with respect to such lay preachers as have started up among their people, the best and

wisest way was, with the King of Moab, "neither to bless them at all, nor to curse them at all;" but to leave them to themselves. Such has often been the language of very able men—language which savours more of wit than of wisdom. Had such men done their duty, they might, by encouraging, improving, and regulating this species of agency, not only have prevented a world of evil, but have turned it to admirable account among the souls of men, against the day of judgment. As Watson lays it down—"They must rise with this auxiliary agency, and work with it." This is one of the unalterable conditions of its safe and efficient employment; and thus managed, it will never fail.

Clerical *Imbecility*—by which is meant the lack of moral courage, of manly decision—has contributed its full share towards the catalogue of evils. Men of this class have been numerous among the clergy. This elegant and fashionable attribute deems it a privilege to be allowed to live; and it considers, that one of the chief luxuries of life is—quietness! It is always ready and willing to purchase peace by any means, and at any price. This gentle temperament would scarcely, unless impelled by a hard necessity, walk against the summer's breeze. Imbecility dreads novelty—it shrinks from difficulty. It has no sagacity to conceive an arduous project of benevolence, where such agency is concerned, and, if a plan be presented, it has no skill to execute it. There is peril in all its paths—there is a lion in every street. History shews, that it is under the feeble rule of such men that the largest measures of lay mischief have arisen. When lay power has sprung up, they have neither had the courage to crush

it, nor the vigour to grasp it, and harness it, and guide its energies, and turn it to account. Like the monarch of the forest, it has been allowed to roar without reply, and to rage without resistance. To this, as much as to any thing, must we ascribe a large proportion of the evils which have accompanied this species of labour.

Clerical *Pride* has exercised no small influence in augmenting the evils of lay agency. What is ecclesiastical history but a chronicle of the operations of this accursed passion? The distinction itself, indeed, of men into lay and clerical, is the offspring of pride, and wholly unknown to the word of God. It was one of the first of the manifold mischievous devices of priestly ambition. Altensfaig, in his *Lexicon Theologicum*; has given us the appropriate definition, according to the literature of Popery, of these two important terms, which is as follows:—"A clergyman signifies a learned man, scientific, skilful, full of knowledge, accomplished, and intelligent."—"A layman signifies an unlearned man, unskilful, silly, and obtuse." The lexicographer then institutes a comparison of their respective characters and claims—"Every clerk or clergyman, in so far as he is a clergyman, is respectable—a layman, again, so far as he is such, is despicable—clergymen also are, as a body, justly superior, and ought to have precedency of laymen." These words, in the palmy period of Popery, were full of meaning; and amongst Protestant Churchmen they have meaning still—meaning which most materially affects the subject of this treatise. It is truly lamentable to find the venerable Scott, a man clothed with almost every Christian excellence which can adorn or enoble human nature—and that near the close

of his long and observant life—penning such counsels as the following to a clergyman who had consulted him as to the best mode of managing prayer meetings. He gravely asserts, that, if the clergyman "attend, none should officiate except himself, or some clerical friend, or assistant; for it must destroy all ministerial authority and influence, for him to be present, while one of his flock, a *layman*, is the mouth of God to the company, or of the company, in addressing God."* Is there any thing in the Sacred Scriptures, so profoundly studied by, and so intimately known to, the great Commentator, which, in spirit or expression, bears the remotest resemblance to this language? Whether does it savour most, of Rome or of Jerusalem—of the principles of Paul or of the Pope? How the generally candid, enlightened, noble-minded man, who wrote the Commentary on the Scriptures, could indite the letter of which the above is an extract, is not a little marvellous. One would surely have thought, that Thomas Scott had "not so learned Christ." But after this display of the great expositor, under gray hairs and a weight of years, we can hardly be surprised at finding the more youthful biographer of Mr. Walker eulogizing his hero for the inflexible rigour with which he preserved his clerical dignity amid the rustics of Truro, in Cornwall. He assures us, that in certain religious societies, which the excellent Mr. Walker formed for the edification of his parishioners, "he assumed that due control of the people which belongs to the minister, and prevented all improper trespass on his province by reserving to himself the sole performance of the devotional exercises."† In support of this

* Scott's Life, p. 519. † Sidney's Life of Walker, p. 66.

Cornish discipline, Mr. Sidney contends that "laymen officiating in the presence of their authorized minister, and endeavouring to *rival* or *eclipse* him in prayer, exhibit great violations of decency and order!"* Such is the extraordinary language of the biographer and relative of Rowland Hill. This language indicates a state of things of which, we are free to confess, we have no conception. This is a species of emulation which must be confined to the Establishment. Congregational churches know nothing of such rivalry. Such are the views of some Evangelical Churchmen, but they will soon cease to be exhibited in England; the diocesan of Chester has done enough to put an end to such impertinence, folly, and mischief.†

These notions may sound strange in the ears of Nonconformists, which have been long inured to the language of Sacred Scripture, but they are perfectly or-

* Sidney's Life of Walker, p. 68.

† The objurgatory passage by Scott has been a prodigious favourite with a certain class of Churchmen all over the world. The spirit and conduct of the party are admirably hit off by the excellent Bishop Griswold, of America, in the following passage:—

"It is not a little encouraging to those who attend the meetings, that, with the disposition which has been manifested to disparage them, and, after search over the whole face of the earth, to discover their ill effects, so little has been found. It is, indeed, not a little remarkable, and shows the paucity of evidence against those meetings, that Mr. Scott's testimony should be so often brought forward in various quarters of the world, from India to the United States, and by those, too, who, on any point at variance with their own opinions, would not, it is believed, deem his authority of much weight. After long experience, we have not, to the Lord's praise be it said, discovered any of those bad effects which some of our brethren apprehend. The evil most to be feared, and most prevalent among us, is lukewarmness. With shame must we acknowledge, that we incline to be cold rather than hot. Enthusiasm is as rare in our churches, as a scorching sun is in a northern winter; the mercury of our zeal is constantly below the degree of temperate."

thodox. Cardinal Bona was of the same opinion ; * nor can there be the slightest doubt, that such in all ages has been the creed of Antichrist. Such in particular have been the spirit and the language of Churchmen, and, in some measure, of Nonconformists, too, in those times and countries in which it has been represented that the evils of lay preaching have most prevailed. To this spirit, and the conduct which flows from it, these evils are mainly to be attributed ; they bring them about by *doing violence to regenerate human nature.* It has been said, with equal truth and beauty, by one of the most enlightened prelates that ever appeared in court or Parliament, in relation to this very subject, viz.—pride in the clergy suppressing lay agency for the good of souls on the part of the people—"that indeed there is an error, not unfrequently received, and too flattering on one side to human *pride,* and on the other to human *indolence,* to be easily uprooted, which

* The following is a translation of this dignitary's views on the subject, as intelligible as his wretched Latin can well be made :—"Concerning laymen, in whom pride, the mother of blindness, reigns, so far as respects those things which regard faith and morals. For when, like simpletons, they presume to explain the Sacred Writings, which are the most profound of all writings; and again, when they happen to possess any external accomplishment, they despise all others, and being thus doubly blinded by pride, they deservedly fall into that worst error through which they are infatuated by God, so that they know not how to discern what is good and what is evil. Wherefore let not laymen read all the books of the Sacred Scripture. For as there is nothing so sacred, or salutary, or pious, which hath not chanced to be abused, so hath it fared with books, with respect to which the fault is not in the writers, but the wickedness is in the abuse. They are not, however, to be restrained from moral, devout works, which have no difficulty, or ambiguity, or absurdity in their translation; of which sort are the histories, lives, or legends of the Saints." Principal Campbell very naturally exclaims at the close of this passage, which he quotes in the original—"How condescending is the good Doctor !"—See Campbell's Lectures, vol. i. pp. 297—300.

must entirely preclude the Christianization of a large and increasing country. It was an essential part of the Romish system, *to confine the concerns of religion to the clergy alone*, and to establish the notion that an active regard for the souls of men in the laity, would be a *presumptuous interference* with sacred things. Such notions must be discarded as devices of the enemy of God and man. They subvert the very principles of Christianity, which, when cordially received, supply the motive, and furnish the energy, for universal exertion." * In reference to the influence of the Gospel on the individual hearts of its receivers, the same admirable writer says— "It interests each in the welfare of all—it employs each in the service of its deliverer—it *makes him an Evangelist as far as his influence or his authority extends.* He can no more sit quietly down and enjoy his own privileges whilst his fellow-creatures around him are perishing in ignorance and sin, than one who has been rescued from shipwreck, could lie calmly on the shore, and see the companions of his voyage sink one after another beneath the waves, without an effort for their preservation." †

The above is always, substantially, the state of things where the Gospel comes with saving power, but in seasons of great refreshment and abundant conversion, when "floods are poured out upon the dry ground," it is emphatically so. It is then found impossible to suppress emotion, to silence speech, and to prevent exertion. Then even good men, however, have at times used every effort to *extinguish* the fire of heaven in the hearts of the faithful, and *then* it is that the evils, real or imaginary,

* Bishop of Chester's Triennial Charge, p. 18. † Ibid. p. 17.

of lay agency begin to appear. The infatuation of such men may be thus illustrated.—From some change or obstruction among the currents which move in the caverns of the earth, a strong fountain breaks forth in a field. We may at least conceive that the ignorant and inexperienced husbandman, anticipating the destruction of his property, commences a fierce war with the mighty element, determined to suppress it. He hastens to obstruct and confine the floods to their subterraneous chambers. He piles upon the mouth of the fountain a prodigious accumulation of stones, turf, and timber, and hopes he has succeeded fairly to imprison the hostile waters. The result is quickly seen; his labour is worse than lost; streams break forth on every side in ungovernable fury and confusion, in spite and in defiance of all his preventive measures. If, instead of this preposterous attempt at obstruction, he had taken immediate steps to cut a channel to receive the resistless torrent, he might have conducted it whithersoever he pleased, and have rendered it abundantly subservient at once to use and to ornament; whereas, by a fruitless conflict in violation of the laws of nature, he has, if he persevere, brought desolation on his property. Every one, at all conversant with the subject, will perceive the analogy to be complete in all points necessary for the purpose of illustration.

Clerical *Jealousy* has likewise done its part. However strange it may seem, that such a passion should be allowed to enter the breasts of men professing to be an order dedicated to sanctity and to God, yet it is most true of thousands who have walked in black, that, while they have been "nicely jealous" of their own repute, they have

been maliciously prodigal of that of lay preachers. Instead of "rising and working with them," such clergymen have at one time, ranged themselves in the most determined opposition; and at another, they have looked on with suspicious though passive fear. Many a pastor there has been who has causelessly afflicted his soul with meditations on the possible mischiefs of lay preachers. Even when courted and intreated by the preachers themselves, in the spirit of affectionate respect, to teach and rule them, and use them for the good of souls and for the glory of God, it has often happened that the jealous minister, on various pretexts, refused, and

> "Gnawing jealousy, out of their sight,
> Sitting alone, his bitter lips did bite."

Pride has pursued one course and jealousy another. Jealousy would scarcely have attempted to close the fountain; she would have preferred to stand and shed tears at a distance, and to impeach the qualities of the waters, warning mankind against them. Jealousy has, however, performed great things, after her own plan, in the way of traducing lay agency. Many a dark portrait has she drawn. She has written much faithless history, and uttered many false prophecies concerning it. This she may claim as her own especial province and vocation. In this way, even if she had originated no evils, she has monstrously multiplied, magnified, and aggravated those which have arisen from other causes. But she herself has been in various ways a fruitful source of these mischiefs, from a sullen neglect of those duties, a faithful discharge of which would most effectively have prevented them, and educed from this agency the most abundant good.

The *third cause* consists in the want of proper preparation in lay agents. The neglect which has prevailed on this point among the Reformed Churches, during the last 200 years, is scarcely credible. We have already seen the admirable effects of the preparation of lay agents in connection with missions, but in Protestant Europe, it is a fact equally remarkable and lamentable, that, until the present century, little or no attention has been paid to the culture of laymen for purposes of ecclesiastical usefulness, and very little even since that time. This neglect is a prime cause of all the evils which have resulted from it, and the proper preparation of proper men is the only and the infallible remedy. Not one evil has arisen for which a thorough preparation and right management would not have constituted a lasting cure. With the understanding and the heart properly stored, trained, and disciplined, laymen would have furnished few materials for the historian of their misconduct. This, however, is only one view; while defective preparation has led to unutterable mischief, it has likewise, in innumerable instances, clothed lay agency with impotence and insignificance.

The *fourth cause* consists in the want of system and regulation, upon proper principles. As things have generally been conducted, had lay agency worked well, or even sustained a negative character of harmlessness, it would have been a wonder of no ordinary magnitude, an effect without a cause, a sort of miracle. Every man has been left to judge of his own qualifications, and of his own call, to select his own field of labour, and to occupy it at such times and seasons, and in such manner, as he has thought

fit. Churches and pastors have stood aloof, or opposed. Ignorance, error, immorality, enthusiasm, fanaticism, insanity—all, in turn, have prated or preached; and they to whom the Head of the church has entrusted the rule and government of His kingdom, have looked on, or closed their eyes, while hosts of such men have,

> —"meteor-like, flamed lawless through the void,
> Destroying others, by themselves destroyed."

No provision whatever has been made for selection, rejection, appointment, superintendence, control, and exclusion. Yet Europe and America have resounded from shore to shore with complaints of lay agency. It is time that complaint should give place to reformation, and that justice should be done to this most important species of instrumentality.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE PREPARATION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES FOR EVANGELICAL EXERTION.

Assuming that Congregational Churches are, upon the whole, in a thriving condition, still it may be safely asserted, that they are far from being prepared for a general and an efficient commencement of apostolic efforts to propagate the Gospel. Many churches, too, are as unprepared for success as for labour. They neither desire, nor expect it. Nevertheless, there is life, but it is languid; there is love, but it is cold. The spiritual taste, in many of the churches, is more or less vitiated and perverted in respect of doctrine, and hence their preference of ministrations, which partake but slightly of a stimulant and practical character, and their aversion to the emphatic inculcation of works of faith and labours of love.

All such churches, therefore, must undergo a thorough renovation of existing elements, and procure an immense augmentation of competent instrumentality, before they can possibly act with subduing effect on surrounding neighbourhoods, on the nation, and on the world. Let

this conviction be deeply and universally impressed upon every heart; for the success of all Evangelical effort mainly depends not simply upon its amount, but upon its spirituality. The true state of the body of Congregational Churches is, therefore, a matter of paramount importance, and ought to be the subject of rigid inquiry.

It must not be thought, that the time devoted to this investigation is thrown away. In all great and arduous undertakings, nothing is more to be dreaded and deprecated than impatience of preparation; for time saved by the abridgment of this, should it not prove fatal, must ultimately be repaid with mortifying interest. Even after the Apostles had received the commission to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," they were commanded to await the appointed time for imparting the necessary qualification. Thus the Master enjoined them:—"Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." Notwithstanding the manifold difference of circumstances, the principle laid down for the government of their conduct applies, with equal force, to the government of ours. Our "power," though not miraculous, is not less essential to our success than that by which they wrought signs and wonders and mighty deeds, was to theirs. Now, to a Christian Church, scripture knowledge, is power—apostolic order, is power—correct acquaintance, on the part of each member, with the true nature of Christ's kingdom, is power—union among the members as a body, cemented and upheld by mutual intercourse, and mutual love, is power—skill and experience in organized methods of Evangelical operation, is power—ardent zeal, guided by

prudence, is power—enlightened piety and expanded charity, is power. It is of the utmost moment that every Congregational Church in the empire should be endued with the power that flows from a union of these particulars. On this will depend, not merely its collective strength, but also the amount of its efficient agency; for it will be generally found that, in proportion as the agency is defective in quality, it is also defective in measure. This fact is illustrated in the Congregational body, and still more among some other denominations, at the present time; for there is not only, in most cases, a defect in the character of their agency, but likewise in its quantity, which is wholly inadequate to an aggressive enterprise worthy of their principles and position, and commensurate with their duties, and the wants of their respective neighbourhoods.

SECTION I.

OF THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE.

The first step then towards a better order of things, and a preparation for Evangelical effort, is to secure to every member of every church a correct and extensive acquaintance with the sacred Scriptures. This is a species of erudition absolutely necessary to every Christian who

aspires to usefulness; but it is very far from being generally possessed in religious communities. Pastors, there is reason to fear, frequently take too much for granted respecting their people, upon this as well as other subjects, and treat multitudes as men, who are but babes in Bible knowledge. Many, both among the rich and the poor, in their younger years, have enjoyed few advantages of religious training, and they have grown to maturity almost ignorant of the very rudiments of Christianity, and especially of the words of inspiration. They have been brought at last under the power of the truth, which they have through grace believed to the salvation of their souls, and, though weak in faith, they have been properly received to the fold of Christ. The business of their spiritual education, therefore, now begins;—they are henceforth to be trained to usefulness on earth, and to glory in heaven. But what means or instruments are provided, even in Congregational Churches, for this process of tuition? Absolutely none, of general bearing upon all the members in their several gradations of attainment, except pulpit lectures and discourses, which, how excellent soever, are, from their necessarily general and miscellaneous nature, but especially from their matured and elevated character, wholly unsuited to meet the case of multitudes. Mere pulpit instruction, enjoyed, as in the case of thousands, only once a week, and not always so frequently, can never suffice for the proper cultivation of such persons, and for rooting and grounding them in truth and love. No other means, however, are provided for the body of the members. After their admission, no account is taken of their spiritual progress, application, or attain-

ments; no stimulus is furnished to improvement; no aid or direction is given, besides what is supplied by the pulpit. Under such circumstances, the result cannot be other than we at present find it. But, surely, nothing can be more preposterous. Similar procedure, in our higher schools and seats of learning, would be speedily and universally fatal to the immediate interests of education, and, ultimately, to the general existence of profound and various knowledge, whether of literature or of science. Experience has amply shewn, in our colleges and universities, how very little depends upon mere lectures, and that methods far more close, personal, and laborious, both to tutors and to students, are indispensable to success in academic pursuits. It is an established fact, that the most efficient professors of modern times, deliver the smallest number of prelections, and those, by no means either rich or elaborate. Their claims to fame and grateful praise rest upon far other grounds than those of polished periods and splendid oratory.

Now, whatever be the subject of instruction, the true principle of tuition is the same; and on no other can education, whether in science or theology, be carried on with general, uniform, and certain success. It needs, therefore, be no marvel if, upon the whole, the present method of conducting the religious education of Christian churches has generally proved abortive, as most assuredly it has done. Allowing for exceptions, more or less numerous according to circumstances, examination will show, that ignorance of Evangelical doctrine, and especially of the sacred Scriptures, reigns to an incredible extent even in the most enlightened bodies. They possess nothing at

all like a familiar acquaintance with either the historical or doctrinal parts of the oracles of God. A few meagre notions of the Gospel plan of salvation make up the sum of their attainments;—of many it may be truly said, that when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have still need of some to teach them even first principles. Their spiritual faculties also are in a condition, which but too well harmonizes with their lamentable ignorance. Many, very many, members of churches, who have been long in fellowship, are, notwithstanding, incapable of conducting the worship of God, to edification in their own dwellings,* and incompetent to the proper training of their own children. In churches comprising several hundred members, how few are able, in a creditable way, to visit a sick-bed, a prison, or a workhouse! How limited, even in such a church, is the number of those, who are duly qualified to take part in a public prayer meeting, or to address a small congregation of poor people! These things ought not so to be, and, while they exist, it is no wonder if churches are feeble and inefficient, and manifest a paralysing lack of lay agency.

* What shall be said of the appearance of so many forms of family prayer during the last ten years—some of them written by Dissenting ministers, and recommended by Dissenting ministers? A few of these works have been issued in Scotland. This is a new thing in that nation, and utterly abhorrent from the anti-papal spirit of the "olden time," by which that country was so nobly distinguished. The issue of such works proves that formality is extending, but it omens ill for the spirit of devotion. It is with a bad grace, too, that men so amply patronize forms in the family, and so vehemently repudiate them in the congregation. With all that can be said in behalf of such works full in our view, we must be allowed to say, that they harmonize but ill with our ideas of well-instructed and devout Nonconformity. At best, we can only view them as badges of infirmity.

A remedy must be found for this evil, the disastrous consequences of which are everywhere felt, and visible. The pulpit alone, and the voluntary, public sabbatic-assembly, are not sufficient for the thorough, moral, spiritual, and intellectual culture of a Christian community. Classification, personal contact, and the individual instruction of every member, are indispensable. Apathy must be aroused, pride humbled, sloth banished, and the desire of knowledge stimulated, before Zion can put on her strength, and stand prepared, not only to meet her enemies in the gate, but to extend her triumphs to the ends of the earth. We can only improve our churches by improving the individuals who compose them; and this process of improvement must go forward till every member of every church become qualified for occupying, at least, some humble place in the vineyard of the Lord. The word of God must dwell more richly in the hearts of all our people; the seal of his Holy Spirit must be more deeply stamped on their whole character; their conversation must be more in heaven; and the entire fellowship of every church must be much more spiritually-minded: —all this, and more than this, must be realized, before they can justly hope to work deliverance in the land. Never, till their members shall take to themselves the whole armour of God, and shall burn and shine as lights in this dark world, can Congregational Churches look forth upon the nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland, or Gentile lands, as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the the sun, and terrible as an army with banners! To effect a preparatory work so glorious, however, will require time, skill, much labour, and many

hands. Pastors alone are utterly unequal to it. If it shall ever be accomplished, it can only be through pastors, aided by the vigorous and well-directed agency of laymen; and, when accomplished, by such means alone can it be sustained and perpetuated.

SECTION II.

OF INSTRUCTION IN CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLES.

A SECOND point essential to the interests of truth, and the efficient operation of Congregational Churches, is, to secure to all their members a thorough knowledge of their own principles. The necessity of this is insisted on, not for purposes of contention, but of obedience. For this knowledge we should equally contend, were there not a vestige remaining of a State Church, or were there no other sect of professors in our land. We consider Nonconformity as simply another name for scriptural Christianity; and desire that, amongst our people, it may not be an accident, but an affair of conscientious conviction. There is, however, ground to fear, that, in the case of not a few, it is much otherwise; and that, therefore, not understanding their principles, they neither value, nor exemplify, nor support them, in a proper manner. This, which is but a portion of the manifold results of

such ignorance, is extensively fatal to the best interests of Independent Churches, and, consequently, to the successful diffusion of Gospel truth, and the pure administration of Christian ordinances. But no provision whatever is made for the instruction of our churches in this great department of Gospel knowledge. The body of believers are left to live without it, or to pick it up as they may be able or inclined—a course highly objectionable and hazardous, since this is a subject of inquiry which, for obvious reasons, not one in a multitude will voluntarily pursue, so long as a blind and thoughtless acquiescence serves the purposes of fellowship. Hence arises the comparative ignorance respecting it of a large proportion even of our deacons, and, perhaps, the majority of our people. Of those who possess a measure of light upon the subject, few have more than a glimpse—a large amount of well-digested information upon it is the lot of a very limited number of our leading laymen, and by no means the property of all our ministers. Many, indeed, among both these classes, manifest somewhat of antipathy to the subject, and can scarcely, without impatience, endure the mention of it. It is, therefore, not strange, if, in the churches with which such men stand connected, there exists a laxity of principle, and a lassitude of spirit, which keep them aloof from all those meritorious movements that partake of an onward, improving, purifying, consolidating, and yet thoroughly Congregational character. This, too, explains the cause of the slender support, and the languid course of Congregational literature, even in the hands of the highest talent, and, especially, of periodical attempts to promote the stability and extension of

the Congregational System. It also accounts for the fact, that so many of the youth of our superior families, including a portion of the children even of our pastors, annually depart from the fold of their fathers, and give the preference to a more showy ritual, although incorporated with a load of anti-christian corruptions, and most defective in the means of spiritual improvement. These results, however much to be deprecated and deplored, flow, and will inevitably flow on, from generation to generation, unless means be devised for the instruction of our members, and their children, respecting the true constitution and character of the Kingdom of Christ. Dissent will then cease to be a thing of temporary taste, or local convenience, or attachment to an individual minister, and become a matter of judgment, of conscience, and of devout homage to the authority of Christ.

Whatever indifference and spurious charity may affect, line upon line and precept upon precept must never cease, till the subject assume a vital aspect in the minds of the members of Nonconformist Churches, and be held to sustain the same relation to the Gospel of Christ as the human body sustains to the human soul. Let the Gospel of mercy, by all means, occupy the first place, but let the regal character of Christ, and the nature of his kingdom, occupy the second. Will any man venture to designate this sectarian bigotry? Will it be thus designated by any Protestant Dissenter? Let such a man hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches:—"Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws

thereof." * It is truly marvellous, that so little attention has been paid to this and kindred passages of Scripture, which exhibit the subject in a light so very momentous from its vital connection with the authority and glory of Christ, and the highest interests of his kingdom upon earth. It is the more wonderful, since this subject constitutes a principal part of the Saviour's commission to his Apostles. It is there set forth as the leading department of pastoral duty. The words of Christ are equally remarkable for their comprehensiveness and their particularity: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."† This injunction is an affair of the utmost importance. It is not one of a series of co-ordinate precepts; it stands by itself in awful solitude, and is solemnly binding on the conscience of every pastor. Oh! when shall it once be, that Congregational Churches, with their bishops and deacons, and all other bodies of Christians, will awake to the conviction, that

* On this text, the excellent Scott, himself a Churchman, has the following emphatic observations:—"By hearkening to all that he says to us, concerning the ordinances and laws of his house, we shall be able to see how rebelliously even professed Christians have prostituted His sacraments, and the sacred ministry, by throwing them open to strangers, enemies, and evidently unregenerate persons, to the disgrace of the Gospel, the grief of true believers, and the encouragement of wicked men. These are gross violations of the covenant, and great abominations, of which it should 'suffice all the parties concerned.' They have always been the ruin of vital godliness, in proportion as they have prevailed; and indeed they prevail almost universally."

† On this Scripture Scott thus speaks:—"Let ministers observe to act always under the commission and according to the instructions of the great Head of the Church, and Lord of All; let them still preach the Gospel to all around them, administering sacred ordinances by the rule of the Holy Scriptures, and teaching the people not only a few *doctrines*, but to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded them."

order is just as essential in sacred as in civil polity; in churches as in nations? How long will it be till they become thoroughly and practically convinced, that the purity and peace, the preservation and prosperity of every Christian society, depend upon the knowledge, love, and obedience of Christ, in all things? Were believers thus taught, and thus to walk in his ordinances and commandments, they would exhibit a moral strength and a spiritual beauty, of which there have yet been few examples, even among the Independent Churches of the British empire; while, on the other hand, ignorance and a neglect of these things are the chief source of the abounding corruptions, the moral impotence, the strife, confusion, and evil work, which occasionally appear even among Protestant Dissenters.

To subject a church to a complete course of training on this point, as on the former, must obviously be a work of great labour to pastors, and a work in which lay-assistance, to a considerable extent, must be employed. The means and method adopted must, moreover, sustain a permanent character, and be kept in perpetual operation, that the churches, once instructed, may maintain their ground, and not relapse into former ignorance and lethargy.

SECTION III.

OF MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND AFFECTION AMONG THE MEMBERS OF CHURCHES.

A THIRD point necessary to the due preparation of the churches is, to promote mutual knowledge and affection among their members as a basis of general union. The importance of this union can hardly be over-estimated, and its want is severely felt, even in Congregational Churches, throughout all the land. It is not meant merely that the members know little of each other, but also, that the bishops and deacons have generally, and, on the present plan, unavoidably, a most imperfect acquaintance with the bulk of the flock, in all large churches in great towns and cities, being hardly able to recognize many of them in the street, and knowing little or nothing of their personal character and general conduct. This is the inevitable result of the defective machinery of our churches. An individual, for example, applies for membership; after the adoption of the usual measures, the applicant is received, and there is an end of the matter. From that hour, all farther *necessary* personal intercourse between him and the minister ceases. Unless circumstances, of rare occurrence, bring them together again, they may continue for half a century to sustain their ecclesiastical relation to each other, and yet never meet, till they meet in

judgment! In the large churches of great towns and cities—and, of course, we except very limited fellowships, small towns, and villages—proofs innumerable of this statement are ready. Nor can it be otherwise, for there is, generally speaking, no systematic provision made for the cultivation of pastoral intercourse, or for the maintenance of that Christian friendship which commenced with admission. It is thus that we watch for souls, as those that must give account! But matters are, if possible, still worse between the members as among themselves. In the greater societies, there is little or no union. Many of the members, who have been in fellowship a number of years, have scarcely made a single acquaintance in the church; they have gone and come unknowing and unknown. Except the few whom office, or prominence in station, or works of faith and labours of love, have happily combined and united, the rest, or at least a majority of them, resemble a multitude in a market place, where a few are known by face to each other, and all besides are strangers. The effect of this state of things is every where palpable and injurious. It renders church fellowship little more than an empty name. It is true, there is joint participation of the Lord's supper; but, in relation to unity, that ordinance is a sign almost without a substance. It exhibits the members as "one bread," but where is their oneness of heart and soul? Where is their sympathy—their weeping with those that weep, and their rejoicing with them that rejoice? Where is mutual intercourse, mutual comfort, mutual burden-bearing? What is there among them to satisfy and illustrate the glowing language of the New Testament

epistles? It is not meant, that, in a large church, it is either needful, desirable, or possible for every member of every rank to know every other member of every other rank. This is not essential to the enjoyment of the privilege of Christian fellowship. Acquaintance so extensive must necessarily be general and superficial; while the knowledge required must be more intimate, and, therefore, more limited. The largest churches may be so managed as to yield to every member all the benefit and comfort of the smallest. This, however, demands arrangements whereby each shall certainly and intimately know and be known to a limited number of those who are fellow-members and faithful friends. These arrangements again must provide for a certain amount of intercourse of a fixed, social, and religious character, which farther implies the existence of an extended system of classification and superintendence, far exceeding the capabilities of any one pastor. Such an arrangement is absolutely necessary to the individual and collective comfort and welfare of Congregational Churches; for without it, that union, which is the very basis of their moral strength and evangelical efficiency, as instruments in the hand of the Eternal Spirit, cannot exist, and they can never succeed in attempts to recover and renovate a lost world. In forming and sustaining the plans essential to accomplish this vast object, pastors must again draw largely on the agency of laymen; and the churches that require such aid may most easily be made to supply it.

SECTION IV.

OF CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS.

THERE is a fourth point, in the preparation of churches, of the utmost importance. Every pastor should obtain and preserve an accurate estimate of the intellectual and moral resources of every church. Of all species of statistics, this is the most valuable. Every Congregational Church is a mine, which, if properly worked, would display a vast amount of unlooked-for riches. Independent Churches generally, however, have not yet established any method, by which to take the gauge and dimensions of their own capabilities for evangelical service. The whole of their arrangements proceed upon a contrary principle. The various efforts of benevolent exertion amongst them are chiefly self-originated, and of voluntary tender. Members, possessing great capabilities for usefulness, may come forth, or they may remain in obscurity till death remove them. Unless benevolent zeal impel them forth, they may hide all their talents, till their offended Lord shall come and demand of them his own with usury. Members, too, possessing distinguished capabilities, in a state of uncultivated nature, exist by thousands, among Congregational communities, like diamonds in the earth, whom proper encouragement and culture might have elevated into the first stations of the Church

of God; but, as things now proceed, they are utterly lost to the church, to themselves, and to Him who bought them with his own blood.

Every church is a territory, assigned to its pastor by the Lord of All, to cultivate for him until he come; every thing upon it, therefore, must be turned to account. The education, talents, capabilities, history, and circumstances, of every admitted member ought, as far as possible, to be known to the pastor. Arrangements should be made for the uniform and certain accomplishment, as far as practicable, of this paramount object. With all the facts attainable fully before him, the next step is, to separate and classify the parties, leading such as are ready into appropriate fields of labour, and providing for the cultivation of those who require it. In this way we will discover or create resources we never dreamed of; and we shall marshal and move our combined agencies in such a manner, that the little one, by the blessing of God, will soon become a thousand. The moral strength and evangelical capabilities of a church, comprising only one hundred members, thoroughly instructed in Christian doctrine and in Congregational discipline, firmly united in the bonds of love, properly classified, and organized, and officered, and headed by a competent pastor, are hardly conceivable. For purposes of evangelical warfare, they will prove as superior to many existing churches, of the same number, as a body of veteran troops to an equal number of an undisciplined populace. Such churches will be their own witness, and their own defence, and will incontrovertibly expose the unscriptural character of those huge masses, including much ignorance and corruption — parochial

assemblies—which have too long passed for churches of Christ. If it be observed again, that those arrangements necessarily imply and demand a vast addition of assistant agency to the pastor, it is readily granted; and the benefits resulting to the church from such assistance will be equalled only by those which result to the agents themselves, and to the world around.

When these four points shall have been, in some good degree, realized, then, and only then, will the Church be in a situation to make a hopeful commencement of her evangelical operations. It is not denied that, with a preparation far short of this, she has been the instrument of much good; but it is contended, that, in proportion as she shall realize this preparation, she will accomplish more. Let her not cease from her labours, that she may perfect her preparations; let both go hand in hand, till she shall have "set in order the things that are wanting." The best methods of realizing this preparation will be discussed in the following pages.

These sections may suffice to indicate our notions of the necessary preparation of Christian Churches, in order to extensive usefulness. The next chapter will amplify the chief of these points, as well as furnish a variety of striking and instructive illustrations, which will be duly appreciated by practical men.

CHAPTER VI.

GENERAL VIEWS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHURCH UNION, CONGREGATIONAL CLASSIFICATION, DISTRICT DIVISION OF CHURCHES, AND LAY HELPERS.

Before we begin to describe and specify practical methods of procedure, we must look abroad upon the churches, inquire into the history of the past, and ascertain whether we can derive any assistance from the experience of others. We shall, in so doing, hold ourselves ready to receive instruction, without the slightest regard to the quarter whence it comes; for this is a question not of sects and parties, but of usefulness to the souls of men, and of the best means of advancing the glory of the Son of God.

SECTION I.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH UNION.

The wise and well-disciplined mind, amid all its speculations and experiments, will always set a high price

upon established facts; and, in framing schemes and systems of benevolence, it will endeavour, as much as possible, to found them upon such facts rather than upon arguments. To meet, and, in some measure, to satisfy this practical instinct, the present chapter will combine a body of facts, with certain self-evident but important opinions, upon the subjects of Church Union, Congregational Classification, District Division, and Lay Help. This chapter is, therefore, to be viewed as introductory to those which immediately follow, and which develop the plan.

Both the church and the world are beginning to awake to the importance of union. Man has at length discovered in this a remedy for his individual impotence. The union of skill, strength, and property, has already achieved, and is hourly realizing farther wonders—commercial, mechanical, religious. Illustrations are now abundant on every hand. The mighty science of acting by association is, however, only in its infancy. We behold, as yet, but little more than the first development of the great principle of working by joint forces. The Congregational denomination are very imperfectly alive to this most momentous subject. The union of the individual churches is lamentably defective, and the union of the churches, as a body, is in a condition yet more deplorable. The Independents would do well, for a little, to make a study of the Church of England establishment, which, at the present moment, presents a most instructive spectacle. The most powerful of all her periodicals has begun to deliver admirable lectures on the omnipotence of union. The conductors of that work have long been telling their

own community, that wisdom must arrange what necessity suggested, dividing and yet blending, combining centralization with diffusion, and marking out for the several parts their proper places in the unity of the whole—since, otherwise, there will be an incessant waste of exertion, and a clash of objects;—that the ultimate stage of improvement in action, as in science, is that in which there will be the greatest unity and the greatest variety, the greatest amount and the least confusion in operation, the best direction and the least loss of power. They affirm, as a certainty, "That men are now rapidly coming to the knowledge, in how hitherto uncalculated a degree, 'Union is strength,' and what wonders may be achieved by the junction of many forces. Churchmen, we are sure, (say they) will not be the only persons to be unmindful how vast is the utility, and how strong the necessity, of acting together as well as singly, in a body as well as apart, and of employing in unison, all the resources with which God has entrusted them, for the purpose of stamping upon the great family of mankind that impress which they desire to see engraven on its heart."* We would, with all the solemnity of a dying request, urge the principle, so admirably expressed in these words, upon the whole body of Congregational Churches.

While this most influential organ is inculcating unity and system on the High Church party, another body of writers, with equal earnestness, and far greater unction and practical skill, are continually pouring streams of argument and illustration, in support of the same duty, throughout all the families of another section of the

* British Critic, No. 42, p. 499.

Church Establishment.* They have begun at length very closely to investigate the economy of Dissent, and to inquire into the secret of its past success, and this, from the avowed conviction that, "the consideration might be of great service in suggesting suitable remedies." This course is not more politic than it is just and honourable. It cannot be denied, that the search has been successful, and that the parochial clergy have at length discovered the real source of their own inefficiency, and of the comparative superiority of the Dissenters. They have proved, by experience, that mere evangelical preaching in the Establishment is not sufficient to neutralize Dissent—they have even found, that such preaching has, in many cases, promoted Dissent, and that conversion to God was often followed by separation from the church. This most natural occurrence has created astonishment, and led to inquiry into "the reasons why Dissent often spreads in the parishes of pious clergymen;" and the result is very pertinent at once to the subject of this section, and the object of this treatise. Speaking of the wants and appetites of the new-born soul, it is at length discovered, that, "In this state of mind, for want of that communion of saints which, (say they) though recognised in our creed, is too little thought of in our practice—for want, further, of that godly discipline and mutual watchfulness of the faithful over each other, which are unhappily obsolete within our pale—and from the neglect also of that

* It is with sincere regret, that we have perceived the altered character of that once admirable periodical—the Christian Observer. Its whole tone towards the body of orthodox Dissenters, and its occasional treatment of individuals among them, eminent for worth and learning, have certainly been any thing but creditable to either its justice or its candour.

affectionate intercourse which should subsist between the spiritual pastor and his flock, and by which the most timid might be encouraged to apply to him in all their doubts and difficulties—they are, perhaps, led to form a connexion with the Methodists, or some other religious community. *The best remedy for the Church of England, under such discouragements, I conceive to be the adoption of a well arranged system of Lay Agency.*" *

These views, at once solid and sagacious, deserve the most profound consideration of the Congregational body. The imperfect state of most of their churches, on these vital points, is the subject we are anxious to place before them. Knowing, by experience, the value of amplified, reiterated illustration, we shall again introduce an able Churchman, whose anxiety, " in the present critical circumstances of the Established Church," has led him to study measures which may " tend to strengthen her influence, and confirm her sway, over the affections of the people." In pursuit of this object, he points out three defects in the present state of the parochial economy of the Church of England. His statements have a special regard to London and other large towns.

1. The " want of all parochial union and fellowship amongst themselves, on the ground of their common faith and duty."

2. The " gulph and *hiatus* between the higher and lower classes of society, which nearly precludes all communication, whether social, civil, or religious, between them."

3. The " little practical intercourse which subsists

* Christian Observer, May, 1831.

between the clergy and their parishioners;—to baptise, to marry, and to bury, is nearly all that takes place (says he) in our largest western parishes between a minister and his individual parishioners.

"It is plainly desirable that some channel should exist, by which this intercourse between the parochial clergy and laity should be enlarged and expanded among us. Nothing would tend so much towards strengthening the church and diffusing kindly feelings amongst their parishioners, as some plan by which they might amicably co-operate with each other for the benefit and advantage of their poor neighbours."* Another Episcopal writer, adverting to the distressing state of spiritual things, which so generally obtains among Established Churches, and pointing out what he considers the only remedy, thus enforces unity:—"What is wanting to give efficacy to these means? A combination of the Evangelical influence of the church, acting with resolute energy on a given principle, by given means, to a given end. Such a combination, under God, would be irresistible." †

These passages, and a hundred more, which might be quoted, shew in what light the ministers of the Establishment begin to view the subject of union, both among the members in each separate congregation, and among all the congregations of the ten thousand parishes of England and Wales. This also is the lesson which we are now so anxious to impress upon all Congregational Churches, with their pastors and deacons. Our first business is to work out a thorough spiritual union, in each individual church; —to convert them into a moral phalanx, well disciplined,

* Christian Observer, April, 1835. † Ibid. May, 1836.

and capable of hard and perilous service for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the first step;—this is the proper preparation for the more complete general union of the body. When its value is seen and felt upon a small scale, there will be the less objection to it upon a large scale. Such, indeed, will be the conviction of its importance, that it will be sought, and solicited with earnestness, by churches, which now only submit to it with reluctance, and loudly called for, by not a few, who now stand aloof from all such confederations as of a Popish tendency. It will always be found, likewise, that those churches which have least individual union among themselves are the most averse to a comprehensive, general union of the body. Let us, therefore, with the utmost energy, press the subject of individual union, and the general union will follow, as a matter of course. Individual union is the basis of all strength in each individual church, and is absolutely indispensable to its usefulness. We must now proceed to inquire how this union can be best effected.

SECTION II.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGREGATIONAL CLASSIFICATION.

By classification is meant, the ranging of individuals into the various classes of which they consist, as it respects attainments, age, and sex. Its importance arises

from the fact, that it enables us to adapt instruction to meet their cases, in all their shades and varieties. The former is necessary to the latter, and the latter is essential to improvement.

The two points of classification of pupils and adaptation of lessons, are, rightly, considered to be almost every thing in secular tuition; but they are at present very little attended to by Christian churches. The worst features of Popery are, in this respect, still prevalent and triumphant among us. When one comes to examine and reflect upon the real condition even of Congregational Churches, it is matter of astonishment to find that so little has been done in the way of return, either to primitive practice upon this subject, or of adopting a course consonant to the nature of things, and calculated as a means to gain the end. The church and congregation are huddled together at the same time, in the same place, throughout the year, without distinction or classification; they present a perfect unity;—they are treated as a perfect unity;—and the instruction exhibits a unity equally perfect. Both as to matter and method, it is wholly unsuited to meet the diversified conditions of the various classes who constitute the assembly. There are attempts made, it is true, by preachers in the pulpit, to distinguish and to classify, which is all very well for passing discourses, but it does not at all answer the purpose of solid, profound, and general Christian education. This state of things has resulted from the entire suppression of lay agency, nor can it, to any considerable extent, be altered or improved, till lay agency be restored.

In the earliest age—the first century—it is certain that

all who professed repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ, were immediately baptised and received into the church. But, in process of time, when persecution ceased, the whole aspect of things became changed, and a new order of society sprang up ;—conversions were less sudden ;—illumination was more gradual ;—multitudes became sufficiently enlightened to renounce idols, who were not sufficiently humbled to receive Christ, and become qualified for church fellowship ; yet they willingly submitted to instruction. A new class thus arose, unknown at the very commencement of Christianity. Such persons were not considered or treated as Christians, but provision was made for their individual instruction in Christianity. Public lectures and sermons were deemed wholly insufficient, or rather quite unsuited, to meet their case. Their privileges corresponded with their state and condition. They "were admitted neither to the public prayers, nor to the holy communion, nor to the ecclesiastical assemblies." * The catechumens, as these persons were designated, consisted of two classes.—The first class was composed of such as had immediately come over from idolatry, and was diligently taught the first principles of the oracles of God, in private, by persons of the pastor's appointment, but, as already stated, were not allowed to enter the public assemblies—a circumstance which served as a spur to improvement. The second class consisted of persons who had passed through the first, and who were now under a course of more liberal instruction, preparatory to baptism. These were admitted to the congregation, privileged to share in the exercises

* Mosheim, cent. 1. part ii. chap. 2.

of devotion, and to hear the sermons, but were required to depart at the close, and not permitted to be present at the celebration of the Lord's supper. When thoroughly instructed in Divine things, and giving evidence of personal piety, they were baptised, and thereby admitted to full fellowship with the church. The period of this process of instruction was longer, or shorter, according to circumstances; "for not the space of time, but the fitness and manners of men," was the object principally attended to. In general, this course of training lasted from two to three years; the Council of *Elvira* fixed two, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, three years.* Historians are unanimous in their testimony to the extraordinary care which was taken by the churches, for several ages, thoroughly to instruct their catechumens previous to their admission to membership. The office of Catechist, therefore, was considered one of the highest honour and importance.

The Moravians are, in this respect, the only class of Christians, in modern times, who, in the main, walk in the paths of pure, primitive Christianity, and who properly understand and exemplify the great principle of classification: and to this, under God, may be ascribed their marvellous success, as missionaries, in all parts of the world. They divide their hearers, according to circumstances, in order to speak individually with every separate company, and communicate to them such instructions as are peculiarly appropriate to each. The classes into which they divide their people are six in number, and are as follows:—

* See Cave and Neander.

1. The unbaptised, who attend the preaching of the Gospel, and whose names are taken down — a circumstance, which constitutes a sort of link of connexion between the parties.

2. The candidates for baptism, who receive particular and appropriate instruction, prior to its administration, and with whom the brethren endeavour to become thoroughly acquainted.

3. Those who have been baptised, "who are frequently put in mind of their baptism, which is the covenant of a good conscience with God; of their share in the death of Jesus, and of the forgiveness of sin, and the hope of eternal life grounded thereupon."

4. Those who have not walked according to the profession made by them at baptism, but have fallen again into sin, whom they admonish, and rebuke, exhorting them to repentance, and directing them afresh to the blood of Christ.

5. Baptised persons, candidates for the full fellowship of the church, whom they instruct in the nature of the ordinance of the Lord's supper, and direct relative to the views and feelings which ought to animate the breasts of its observers.

6. The members or communicants, who are carefully taught, and exhorted so to walk, "that their spirit, and soul, and body, and life, should be to the praise of the Lord."

This is the first Moravian classification; and the mode in which the ministration of the Word is carried on, in relation to it, is the following:—Of these various classes,

all may attend the Sabbath and week-day services, as one promiscuous assembly. Every fourth Sabbath is appointed as a day of special prayer, when the attendance is expected of all who can possibly be present. This is a high day. In addition to public preaching, special prayer, and the administration of baptism, a separate discourse is addressed to each of the forementioned six divisions, suitable to their characters and circumstances. Matters of discipline are also settled on that day. These classes, it will be observed, are addressed, each as a body, by themselves. The propriety and immense importance of this arrangement must be at once apparent. It is a simple dictate of common sense; and the only wonder is, that something analagous to it does not prevail in every Christian denomination.

There is a second classification among the Moravians, of a still more valuable description. Their congregations are divided into what are designated '*Choirs*,' as follows :— 1. The children :—2. The boys and unmarried men :— 3. The girls, and unmarried women :—4. The married people :—5. The widows. These divisions are addressed in separate and appropriate "Homilies, at stated times, that every one may know what he has to do, or leave undone, according to the circumstances of the division to which he belongs." Nor are the brethren content with this measure of assiduity; they "take all possible pains to learn and know every individual, not only according to the outward appearance, but also according to the state of his soul. To this purpose a certain time is appointed, when one after another is called in, with whom one con-

verses separately, in a plain and open manner." From this exercise, it is said that the greatest benefits are realized.*

Now comes the last, and most important, of all the arrangements of these remarkable missionaries. The whole congregation, the unbaptised, the baptised, and the communicants, "meet in small numbers, each sex separately, in order to speak with one another, before the Lord, of what may tend to their salvation and amendment." Each of these classes, or companies, is attended by a person of their own sex, styled the "Helper," who represents the missionary, and leads the conversation of the class. When these little classes are fairly instituted, then new comers, and new converts, as they arise, are regularly distributed among them, according to their sex, age, and character; "thus there are in one company married people, in another widows, in a third young, single persons, &c.; and this is attended with much blessing." †

It will thus appear, that classification among Moravian congregations is carried almost to the utmost possible extent. Some may, indeed, consider that it is overdone; of this the parties themselves are the best judges; and their steady perseverance in a course involving much care and labour, implies more than merely their cordial approbation;—it can only flow from a deep conviction of its great importance. This inference is sustained by facts. The histories of their missionary labours attest its immense benefits, in every part of the world. It has

* See Crantz's History of Greenland.

† Spangenberg's Account, p. 87; and Oldendorp's History of the Mission.

been supposed, and frequently stated, by the less-informed portion of the community, that the system of classes which obtains among the Methodists originated with Wesley. It is quite otherwise ; he unquestionably derived it from the Moravians, although the account given in his journals was the *occasion* which led to its establishment. Nor must the respect, which we unfeignedly feel for that great man, be allowed to stifle the expression of our opinion, that he borrowed *too little*, and left behind much, of the best parts of the Moravian system of classification. But, as this point will occur in its own proper place, we here leave it. Suffice it to say, that that people as much excel all other Christian bodies in their perfect unity, as in their division and classification, by which that unity is created and sustained. How appropriately they are designated "*United Brethren!*" He who would strengthen, must unite congregations ; and he who would unite, must classify them. We now proceed to inquire into certain modifications of the principle, which have been exhibited at various times, and in divers places, by other bodies.

SECTION III.

OF THE DISTRICT DIVISION OF CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS.

THE method of district division is one of easy adoption; and wherever introduced, it has been attended with great success. The principle, and, to some extent, the practice

of this division, have long prevailed in England. The excellent *Maurice*—a genuine and most enlightened Congregationalist, born in South Wales, 1684, whose ingenious and beautiful dialogues were, it is understood, based chiefly upon substantial facts and usages, more or less prevalent in his own day—thus describes a Congregational Church in the city of *Caerludd*, at the period when Christianity was first introduced to Britain.

"The church, as it then dispersedly stood, was disposed into several divisions, and they judged it expedient, that every division should have a private meeting three evenings in a week;—and lest they should be cloyed with their frequency, it was agreed that the *first* should be on the meaning of some portion of Scripture; the *second*, on some head of divinity; and the *third*, on Christian experience. In those meetings, one person was chosen monthly as *president*, and a suitable person as *scribe*. The minutes of those meetings were to be brought to a general monthly meeting, where sometimes the *pastor*, and sometimes the *teacher*, presided; and whatever was thought very pertinent and useful was then entered and kept; what seemed empty and frivolous was laid aside; what appeared unsound, marked and opposed,"

Theophilus, having heard this account, remarked—"I am inclined to think that their meetings of conference were of great use to them."* To this Epenetus

* The following emphatic testimony was borne by a Churchman to the beneficial results of such measures, nearly forty years ago:—"Of all methods that have ever been tried to keep up the power of godliness among our flocks, and to preserve them from being scattered, seduced, corrupted, or tossed about with every wind of doctrine, none has been found so efficacious as this. The more this matter is considered, the

replies—"Of very great use indeed. They were themselves religiously employed, and many of their children, and acquaintance, who sometimes desired to be present, were converted there. Besides, it was of singular advantage to their bishops, who, as I said before, examined *monthly* the minutes of those meetings. From thence they could judge of the state of the flock; how they improved in knowledge and faith; what temptations attended them; and what supports they had under trials;—and even they themselves were often refreshed." *

This method of division has also prevailed to some extent in America, in the best governed societies. The church of the late Dr. Payson was "divided into seven districts; the members of each district met for prayer and conversation once a month, and the brethren, residing in each district, were a standing committee of the church for that district, to supply the wants of the poor, and bring before the church, in due form, any case of discipline which might occur." † A little attention, in Wales also, has been paid to this mode of division. In Scotland, it is not wholly unknown; and, in some instances, it has been acted on with success. The Presbyterian arrangements, indeed, provide for one or two of the chief features of the

more it will appear to be an act of necessity laid upon every faithful parish priest, to form such religious societies among his people, as may bring them into a state of intimate communion with himself and with one another."—*Christian Observer, Sept.* 1802.

* Social Religion exemplified, p. 126.

† Payson's Life, p. 290. In addition to this, they had a monthly meeting of all the brethren for business, a church conference every Tuesday evening, a prayer meeting on Friday evening, a monthly prayer meeting for the Sabbath-schools, a monthly union concert for prayer, an inquiry meeting on Sabbath evenings, &c.

plan, but it is very rarely turned to much account. The Dissenters of England have hitherto, upon the whole, been very regardless of it. The only class of religionists in the empire, strange as it may appear, who are thoroughly alive to its value and importance, are the Evangelical clergy of the English Church. The following paragraphs will reveal a state of things among them, for which very few of us are at all prepared, but from which the best and wisest amongst us may derive a profitable lesson. The best portion of the clergy have obtained a glorious triumph over much, that has hitherto disgraced their order, and impeded their usefulness. The Bishop of Chester has good reason to say, that they have "laid aside many ancient prejudices;" and that the clergy have been led, "as a body, to submit to labour and self-denial unknown to the world, and only seen by Him who seeth in secret."* It is now nearly twenty years since the great organ of Evangelical opinion among them candidly said—"We shall content ourselves with wishing, that much of the general discipline of Methodism were introduced into what we must deem a more scriptural church."† The wish was preceded by the fact. Able and zealous men had been intensely thinking of the economy both of the Methodists and of the Independents, and inquiring how their several excellencies might best be blended. Special attention had been paid to the best mode of promoting Church union, congregational classification, district division, and lay agency, and of making the whole to bear upon the edification of the faithful, and the conversion of men;—and, after an extraordinary

* Third Charge, p. 28. † Christian Observer, Nov. 1820

experiment of the most successful character, one of these ministers comes forward with a history of that experiment, of which the following is the main substance.

The clergyman in question first established a weekly meeting in his own house, for serious inquirers, and for exercises of devotion; after a period of two years, when the number of believers amounted to about fifty, he "resolved to form the little company into a visible church as separately distinguished from the congregation;" and on March 31, 1820, he carried his purpose into execution. The work of the Lord prospered in his hands; and, every month, additions were made to the newly-formed church. "From the commencement," says he, "I perceived the expediency of dividing the town into different districts, and appointing an elder over each district, who should have the care of such members as reside within the district over which he might be appointed, to whom, in case of my absence from home, or their distance of residence from my dwelling, they might go for advice upon any occasion of temporal or spiritual distress." This was to adopt one of the best parts of Scottish Presbytery. Members were received and disciplined exactly as follows:—They first conversed with him, as minister; if he approved, the party next conferred with the elders; and if they concurred, the applicant was then received with the unanimous consent of the church; and offences were managed according to the Scripture rule. So far all was Congregational. The members of each district meeting paid one penny a-week for the expenses of the rent, cleaning, fire, and lighting of the room where they met, and for the relief of infirm

members. Here is one of the best points of Methodism, connected with a circumstance which relieves it of the odiousness with which, however unjustly, it stands invested in the eyes of many.

The business of this society was conducted with the most laudable regard to order; a book was kept, containing the name, date of admission, residence, occupation; state as to celibacy, marriage, or widowhood; children, if any; when, where, and how brought to God; date of separation, when such occurred, and the cause of the same. At the weekly meetings in each district, there were Scripture readings, conversations on points of doctrine, experience, and practice, and exercises of devotion. In answer to the question, "Whether such a plan be beneficial?" the originator replies: "I can answer, that, having had practical proof of its utility for nearly ten years, both my people and myself have enjoyed the advantages arising therefrom, to our mutual edification. And I would ask, what recognition of Christian character, what church discipline, can be established and maintained without some such system as this? But are there no disadvantages? My reply is, *none*, compared with the beneficial effects resulting. It is true, that there is sometimes an apparent effort at *display*, either in the conversation upon our subjects, or in prayer; there may be in a few a taste for dissent from our establishment imbibed, &c.; and there may be an occasional excitement to animosity of temper, when difference of sentiment may be expressed upon the subjects discussed among us; but far better that we endure these trials, than be without the advantages resulting from the church disci-

pline established among us. The very circumstance, that, in the course of ten years, we have been able to contribute upwards of £250 towards the relief of our sick and infirm members, from the surplus of subscriptions received for expenses, is a subject of grateful reflection. Upwards of 330 members have been added to our church since its commencement." * Such is the scheme of this enlightened parochial clergyman ;—a scheme, far superior, according to our judgment, in point of utility, to that of any one of the separate systems which at present divide the country ;—a scheme, which, while it admits of many important additions, if properly worked, is capable of realizing an unrivalled degree of church comfort and evangelical usefulness;—a scheme, too, which is thoroughly scriptural and Congregational. Its admirable adaptation to subserve a multitude of valuable purposes, will at once appear to the mind of a practical man, and such a man will conclude with certainty, that it must have been successful, even if that success had not been attested by its author, who exhibits the drawbacks with an amiable candour, and clearly aggravates rather than extenuates them. Such evils as he specifies are of rare occurrence, and take place chiefly at the outset. Intelligent pastors will know how to appreciate the value of this experiment, and will feel that such a statement of facts is worth whole sections of theory.

From that period the attention of the Church of England Establishment has been strongly attracted to the subject of church union, classification, district division, and lay agency. It occupied clerical meetings to a great extent. In November, 1830, a striking appeal was made to the

* Christian Observer, Oct. 1829.

clergy by one of their own body, on "The advantages to be derived, both to minister and people, from a well-regulated system of lay agency," of which the writer says, "Wherever it has been attempted, God has honoured the means used, by an abundant outpouring of his Holy Spirit; and, in some instances, the moral aspect of a whole parish has undergone such a change, that places, notoriously wicked, have become as remarkable for piety and orderly conduct, while the minister has found his influence greatly strengthened, and his public ministrations better appreciated and understood." He then goes on to state, that the bulk of the Dissenters of England are such, not from choice but from necessity; and to insinuate that it is with most, not an affair of principle but of privilege, "because they consider they can thus enjoy more religious communion and pastoral attention; but wherever the pastoral duties are conscientiously attended to, and *well organized lay agency* introduced into the parish, under the auspices of clergymen, Dissent is not only arrested in its progress, but rapidly declines." That such is, to some extent, the case, cannot be denied, however unpalatable it may be to the ears of the conscientious Dissenter. The bulk of Dissenting Congregations, as already hinted, are, to our shame be it spoken, in a state of lamentable ignorance of their own principles.

This keen observer betrays the hand of a master in every part of his admirable dissertation. Accounting for the success of this moral machinery, the absence of which formerly constituted parochial weakness, and its presence Nonconformist strength, he thus speaks of the new convert:—"It is not enough for him, that the doctrines of

the Gospel are faithfully delivered from the pulpit—he needs *individual* instruction, and caution, and comfort; but if there be no church fellowship, he knows not to whom he can apply for help, for he is, perhaps, too timid to make a direct application to his minister, especially if no public encouragement has been held out for him so to do; and thus he goes on mourning, and uttering the lamentation, 'no man careth for my soul.'" Brethren beloved, ye who entertain Congregational principles, mark this language! Are not ye trusting far too much to the unsupported deliverances of the pulpit, to the neglect of the "individual instruction, caution, and comfort," of your members? Perseverance in your mistake will prove your overthrow. Preaching, in its own place, is a most powerful instrument, and merits the utmost consideration; but there are also other instruments, of an auxiliary character, which can scarcely be over-estimated, and which have been but little attended to by you as a body. On these, in no small degree, the destinies of your denomination must shortly turn.

The magnanimous individual, of whom we are treating, sets an example worthy of imitation, in the following paragraphs:—"It behoves us," says he, "to learn wisdom from the experience of others. How is it, that the Wesleyan Methodists have been able to establish themselves, in such strength and respectability, throughout the kingdom, and to raise the immense funds necessary to carry on their expensive machinery? Simply by using such means as some of those recommended by the Bishop (of Chester), and which might have been used, to much greater effect, in the Church. Every man, who joins

their society, finds some occupation suitable to his talent, however humble, and immediately becomes a working man for the community. Why should not this be the case in the Church of England?"—"I can see no reason why every thing, which has been found really advantageous in the experience of that numerous body of Christians, might not be practised, with much greater success, in the Church of England, under the diligent inspection and control of the clergy."

This is the language of exalted wisdom; but when and where was such language listened to in a charge to a Congregational pastor? When did it appear in the pages of an Independent periodical? There has too often been exhibited amongst other sects a pitiful jealousy of that active body, and, in not a few quarters, a sullen dislike, an ill-concealed prejudice against them. Surely this is most contemptible; since, not to mention higher considerations, it is most impolitic, and most preposterous! How long shall we continue to breathe the spirit of the ecclesiastical quarrels of our ancestors against Wesley, and go on to refuse the adoption of every means calculated to promote the largest measures of good to the souls of men, by whomsoever these means may have been devised, employed, or approved? If such things are good in themselves, are they to be eschewed because adopted by Wesley—a man whose fame will last while the world stands, and whose deeds will add lustre to the laurels of his country, when her poets with their songs, and her heroes with their victories, shall long have ceased to be with her the subjects either of glory or of gratulation? It may help to dissipate the childish but culpable delusion,

to state again, that Wesley was not the originator of the machinery which is so efficiently employed among the people who bear his name—that he derived it, in every part, except that which relates to finance, from the Moravians—that he did not improve, but rather impaired it, by leaving out some of its principal parts. But if he had given it being and order, what then? If it pleased the Head of the Church to endow him with sagacity to devise a mighty instrument for promoting the salvation of men, shall we obstinately reject the heavenly gift? It is allowed, on every hand, and by all classes of Christians, that the Wesleyan apparatus is one of unrivalled power, and has been productive of matchless results; is it not then most unaccountable, that Protestant Dissenters, notwithstanding their superior intelligence and characteristic prudence, have neither adopted it as a whole, nor appropriated any of its parts, nor endeavoured to construct any other system on a like principle, or of a similar character? Is it thus that men of the world act respecting great inventions, or valuable improvements in commerce, mechanics, or philosophy? Is not the proneness to copy, or appropriate, so ungovernably strong, that the munitions of a patent are a feeble protection, and that even the courts of law can scarcely preserve intact the rights of the patentee?

He whom we have been applauding goes on to say—"A friend of mine has adopted, in his parish, very nearly the plan of the Wesleyans, and, with such success, that great numbers have been brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ, and to repentance and newness of life. Such, indeed, is the conviction in the parish, of the spi-

ritual benefits derived from the system, under such an administration, that a large portion of the Dissenters have returned to the bosom of the Church." He next proceeds to set forth the plan adopted in that parish, of which the chief provisions are in substance the following :—

1. A society is formed, composed of believers, and of such as are in a hopeful condition.

2. The members are divided into manageable companies, according to their localities, and meet weekly—when, after praise, and prayer, and a short exposition of a portion of Scripture, they are individually conversed with, and suitable admonition, reproof, or consolation administered, according to their respective necessities.

3. The minister has gathered around him a body of intelligent, devout men, who act as his helpers and deputies. They preside at the weekly meetings of these companies, as the pastor's absence, or the number of meetings, or other necessity, may require ; they also conduct prayer meetings—they read the Scriptures in the distant parts of the parish, and in the cottages of the poor—they visit the sick and afflicted—and in every practicable way assist the pastor.

4. All the members receive a ticket on admission, which is renewed every quarter, unless reasons of conduct may cause it to be withheld ;—at each renewal, the receiver, if able, pays sixpence, which goes to the formation of a fund for the relief of the sick and indigent members.*

* Christian Observer, Nov. 1830.

SECTION IV.

OF LAY HELPERS TO THE PASTORSHIP.

Paul had his "helpers in Christ Jesus;"—and so hath the true Apostolic Church in every age furnished a host of helpers, "who laboured in the Lord."* Our object at present, however, is to carry out the exposition of the Moravian economy. We have already seen the lengths to which they carry union, division, and classification; it only remains to inquire into their scheme with respect to lay helpers. Now every mechanic on their mission stations is an assistant; and, if he be married, so is his wife; but those whom they specially denominate "helpers," are heathen converts. It is a primary object with the brethren, to establish and instruct this species of agency as speedily as possible. The missionary makes a very accurate estimate of the moral, intellectual, and spiritual resources of the converts. This, from their system of inspection and classification, they are enabled very correctly to accomplish. When the gifts and graces of an individual are ascertained, he is then introduced to the work of the mission. So soon as a suitable colleague appears, he is at once added. Apart from higher reasons, this has been found the best preventive of vanity and conceit. As the numbers increase, their individual im-

* Romans, xvi. 3.

portance is diminished; and all spirits keep in better temper, in company, than alone. The helpers are of both sexes: the utmost pains are taken to improve them in knowledge and in piety. The general duties, both of males and females, are the following:—

1. They are to watch faithfully against any disorders that may occur among the people; to visit the sick; to assist occasionally the poor; to act as peace-makers in their respective neighbourhoods; and whatever they find too difficult to manage, they are to report to the brethren.

2. They are to meet and preside in the companies already mentioned, into which the people are classified; the male helpers meeting the men, the female helpers the women, and both, instructing, correcting, comforting, and edifying all, to the best of their ability.

3. They are to keep a special eye upon every individual of the various classes, and endeavour to obtain the most thorough knowledge of their state and character, so as to be able to say who are proper subjects for baptism and the communion.

4. To attend at the helpers' periodical conference, and to report concerning the state of their classes generally, and particularly of the persons proposed for baptism, and of those who solicit admission to the Lord's supper, and to confer on the concerns of the mission at large.

5. Such of the male helpers as have gifts, are required to preach, exhort, and bury the dead.*

Such is the lay system of the Moravians, and the pattern from which the class leaders and local preachers of Methodism were so successfully copied. It was a

* See Spangenberg, Oldendorp, and Crantz.

happy day for England, and the world, which first introduced Wesley to the society of this remarkable people. Both systems are productive of good beyond all comparison with those of any other sect; but the Moravians, as missionaries, have greatly excelled the Methodists. No religious community has done so much, in proportion to its numbers and limited resources, towards the diffusion of Christianity; and it is a distinguishing feature of the Brethren's missions, that their self-denying labours have, in every instance, been directed to tribes on the extreme verge of civilization, or to the outcasts of humanity—the half-frozen Greenlander—the savage Esquimaux—the enslaved negro—and the despised Hottentot—a circumstance by which their missionary apparatus has been subjected to the severest possible test.*

The claims of the Moravians, as missionaries, are not to be determined by arithmetic. Had it been their object to multiply their adherents by the shortest process, and on the easiest terms, they would not have repaired to any of those once bleak and barren regions, which are now clothed with moral verdure and spiritual beauty, and bearing abundantly the fruits of righteousness. The merit and wonder of their work chiefly proceed from the difficulties with which their missionary enterprises have always been surrounded—difficulties of every kind, and all but insuperable—and yet difficulties over which, by faith and patience, labour and prayer, they have uniformly and every where triumphed, through the instrumentality of lay agency.

* See Conder's Analytical View of all Religions—the best work of the kind in the English language—for an excellent account of this remarkable people.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS OF LAY AGENCY.

We are now in circumstances to proceed with the developement of our plans. The facts of the last chapter furnish an argument, absolutely irrefragable, in support of church union, congregational classification, district division, and lay agency. The uniform success which has hitherto accompanied these measures, even when carried on under very imperfect arrangements, may not only suffice to authorize and embolden, but ought to constrain and impel the churches of Christ to adopt them in principle, and to introduce them in practice. Nor should they rest satisfied with simple imitation. With their own experience, and that of past ages, before them, it requires only believing prayer, patient industry, and practical skill, to construct a system, more harmonious in its principles, more complete in its parts, and more generally and extensively efficient in its operations, than any that has hitherto appeared. As these evangelical arrangements now exist, indeed—except among the Moravian Missions and the Methodists—they have little claim to the designation of a

system; they are at best but fragments, for the most part unassorted, or ill-assorted, with little of either the unity or the force of system. Even Wesleyan Methodism, notwithstanding its acknowledged excellence, is an institution which, with respect to its members—children—hearers—Sabbath-schools—and local preaching, still admits of much addition and vast improvement.

SECTION I.

OF THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF EACH DEPARTMENT OF LAY AGENCY.

We lay it down as a fundamental principle, that all evangelical movements, in order to success and permanence, so far as practicable, ought to be congregational, as opposed to general and conventional. Wherever this principle is violated, although the scheme may, for a season, promise much, it will ultimately be found destitute of vigour and vitality. It necessarily carries in its own bosom the seeds of decay and of dissolution. This assertion might command the support of multiplied examples of benevolent projects, which, from this one error, have proved abortive. The perishable fabric may rise, indeed, as if by enchantment; it may at once assume the appearance of power, and clothe itself with great dimensions; but

the whole of such a creation, with all its seeming grandeur, is a delusion, and will issue in disappointment. The very fact of its rapid rise shows it to be a bubble; for things, founded in nature and destined to live, like the oak of the forest, reach maturity by slow degrees, and are the result of much labour and experience. But not a few Christians are equally impatient of effort and of delay, and hence their preference of the artificial to the natural, even after the former has ceased to be necessary, and the latter has become indispensable to efficient operation.

Let this point be well understood. Conventional movements of an evangelical character are, from the very nature of the undertaking, at one period, absolutely necessary:—such is the case, before churches exist in a country, or exist in power and strength sufficient to act congregationally upon a whole population; but they are nothing more than temporary expedients, which must ultimately give place to measures based on other principles. We are, however, speaking of the proper mode of procedure in England, and of the principle which ought to govern evangelical operations in the present state of that country. England has now, to a considerable extent, reached a condition, with respect to religion, which renders the adoption of the congregational principle a thing not only practicable, but of imperative obligation. The demand, however, for operations of a conventional character, is by no means at an end—such operations are still indispensable; but in many large towns and extensive districts, it is otherwise. If the churches already planted in such towns and districts do their duty, that mode of labour may soon, if not immediately, be dispensed with. What remains to be

accomplished there, can be done to purpose only by the churches acting congregationally in their respective neighbourhoods. In them the Spirit of God resides; and through them alone he will subdue the world, and complete the conquest of the Redeemer's love. Every church, like the glorious Gospel of which it is the depository, may be likened unto fire and leaven, which operate by assimilating to themselves, on every side, their kindred elements, when such elements are brought into contact. Churches must act, at all points, on surrounding unbelievers, and daily absorb the faithful into their several fellowships; or, to change the figure, the armies of the Cross, like other armies, require their advanced guards, their spies, and pioneers—such are missionaries, itinerants, and temporary local labourers—but the conquests of that Cross are to be completed, its authority and government established, and its empire preserved, by its own organized masses—that is, by Gospel churches. Missionary efforts, itinerant labours, and all others of a conventional and general nature, must ultimately terminate in those of a local and congregational character. Such is the order of nature. This principle ought, therefore, so far as practicable, to be carefully observed in all our Gospel enterprises, whether in behalf of our village, town, or city population. On whatever scale we may labour, whether our object be to illumine Loughborough or London, a suburban district or a rural region, that labour ought to be carried on by the churches, where churches exist, in their organized capacity.

This view confessedly militates against a multiplicity of projects, which have sought and found a portion of public favour, and more especially against a species of institution,

which has sprung up of late years under the somewhat affected appellation of City and Town Missions. The boast of that species of institution is, that it recognises neither church nor pastor, sect nor party, nor any particular school of theology; and that its only rallying points are—the doctrine and diffusion of the "common salvation." Hence its committee of management is a promiscuous body of Christian men, bound by no other ties than those of the common faith, and of a common object; and every thing relating to its constitution, its supporters, and its agents, is conventional and artificial;—there is nothing appertaining to it congregational and natural. It is, therefore, demonstrably certain to the judgment of every man, who knows any thing of human nature, of bodies ecclesiastical, and of the importance of the principle of central operation in efforts at Gospel diffusion, that an institution so founded, so framed, so supported, and so worked, must labour under a variety of disadvantages, affecting at once its unity, efficiency, and duration. Men, however, of a Catholic spirit, and of a generous nature, but with small experience, and with more of an imaginative than of a judicial faculty, may be found admiring this very defect as a chief excellence; but, unless such admiration can work a miracle, time, the great corrector of all errors, will expose the fallacy.

This view of City and Town Missions, however, must not be misunderstood, or construed into hostility. In our judgment, this species of association, with every other existing for a kindred object, whatever be their defects, is infinitely better than an absolute famine of the word of life. Such missions are an invaluable confederacy, in

every locality where multitudes are perishing, and where churches exist not, or, existing, are asleep, and reposing in criminal indifference. But wherever churches are, and become really awake to their duties, and to the claims of the lost souls who "are drawn unto death" on every side, all institutions so constituted will undergo a change, and their precious elements will be combined into new and more efficient forms. City Missions, so called, moreover, would have deserved well of all good men, had they done nothing more than penetrate the dark and dreary recesses of human depravity and misery, and report to the churches the sights which they have seen, and the things which they have heard;* but when they have done this, and have roused the churches to a proper sense of their duty, their dispensation will then be at an end.

Wherever such missions exist, it was a happy day which beheld their formation; but, although a seeming paradox, it will be a day far happier still, which shall witness their amicable dissolution. Were it our province to offer them counsel, it would be to this effect:—Settle your affairs; convene your constituents; surrender your trust; and let your society expire by resolution. Let the agents be divided among the members of the committee, and with them let such members return to their several churches. Let the ministers of such churches arouse them at once to their duty towards a perishing neighbourhood. Let the

* The services recently rendered by the committee of the London City Mission, for example, cannot be adequately acknowledged. Their statistical labours, and their operations relative to the Scriptures, are results which alone amply compensate all the pecuniary support which they have received, even if they had done nothing else, while it is certain they have been the instruments of much additional good.

churches adopt and liberally support the agents; and let the latter go forth with the full sanction of the pastors and churches, respectively. Let them, severally, labour with the church, and for the church, with which they are connected; let them have their appropriate post in its evangelical arrangements; let them take a chief share in all its evangelical operations, and occupy a foremost place in leading on the ranks of its gratuitous agency: let them, in a word, be pastoral assistants in the work of God. Such a return to the order of Scripture and of nature will add five-fold to their efficiency. Thus allied to the pastors, backed by the whole weight of the churches whom they represent, and sustained on every side by zealous bands of gratuitous agents, these men will find themselves in a position wholly new—a position of strength and stability, comfort and usefulness, presenting a bright and cheering contrast to that of the Town or City missionary. He is a missionary who proceeds from no church, nor association of churches; he is appointed, ruled, and removed, at pleasure, by a convention of individuals; he goes forth ostensibly to convert men, yet he forms his converts into no Christian fellowship, and he administers to them no church ordinance; in his official capacity, he is of no communion—he is merely a general teacher, toiling on in insulated solitude. Such an agency, in its best estate, is necessarily feeble and impotent; and its effects clearly viewed, closely analyzed, and considered as a whole, are, and ever must be, of a corresponding character. This institution, moreover, is utterly crippled in its movements by the nature of its constitution, and its forced catholicity. It is throughout a system of gags

and fetters, and must ultimately share the fate of its fraternity. It is merely an ecclesiastical fungus, not a spiritual organization, like a church of Christ, endowed with inherent, self-supporting vitality; it, therefore, necessarily depends for its very existence upon the uncertain zeal of two or three artificially connected individuals. But an institution which is to bring deliverance from spiritual thraldom to the millions of England, must partake of a more enduring character, wield weapons of greater power, and employ agencies a thousand-fold more numerous, and of greatly more diversified operation.

We must exempt from our censure the institution denominated the Christian Instruction Society, which is at once sound in principle, and, if properly worked, vast in its lay and gratuitous power, and in its capabilities of evangelical usefulness. It provides or admits of the utmost variety of unfettered exertion, and of all Apostolic efforts for the salvation of men. It employs equally the services of both sexes; it admits equally the paid agency of stipendiary evangelists, and the gratuitous assistance of Christian pastors; it equally provides for preaching at settled stations, and on itinerant tours. Upon the principles of that society, churches may work congregationally with compactness, energy, and force, and yet work together in a town or city as a harmonious and powerful confederation. Whatever be the deficiencies, these, without controversy, are some of the excellencies of the Christian Instruction Society.

Our object then is, to carry this all-important principle of congregational operation into every department of

Christian agency ; and to show, that every Congregational Church is an organized body, capable of performing, and designed to perform, all manner of evangelical functions necessary to the spread of the Gospel, and the salvation of men. Such a church, therefore, is to be considered, not as an individual, but as a system—a compound society, branching forth in every direction where work is to be performed in behalf of religious benevolence. There is not one of those various objects appertaining to the local diffusion of Christian knowledge, for which separate societies have been formed, which might not have been far more easily, cheaply, and effectively accomplished by the churches of Christ acting in their individual, organized capacity. Whether those objects relate to Sabbath-school instruction—to the farther culture of young people of both sexes—to Bible and tract distribution—to district visitation of the poor, in towns and cities, for Scripture reading and exposition—to cottage lecturing and village preaching—or to any other pursuits of a like nature, they can be effectively prosecuted only upon one principle—the principle of congregational operation.

For all these objects, a Christian church is a ready-formed, a standing society—a permanent institution. Unless a Christian church operate in all these directions, and in others of a kindred character, according to circumstances, there is a want, an imperfection, in her economy ; and she fails to answer the end of her organization, and of her existence. But, as things now stand, even where one or more of these institutions exist, they sustain, for the most part, the character of distinct, and separate, and independent bodies; or at best, the character of artificial

adjuncts, or mere voluntary appendages, with which neither churches nor pastors, as such, have any connection or concern—and not the character of an element, a constituent part of a complete church. This is the radical evil of the Congregational denomination as well as of other religious bodies, at the present day—an evil which has spread like a canker, and diffused a paralytic impotence among the Lord's hosts throughout the British empire.

SECTION II.

OF THE CHURCH AS THE FIRST DEPARTMENT.

In our method of classification, the church ranks first in the series; and, under this section, it is our object to show how *District Divisions* of the church may be established and conducted; how the church may be prepared for usefulness, and kept in a state of preparation; how her first aggressive movements may be effectually made; and how her lay agents may profitably receive their primary lessons, and safely make their experimental attempts at Christian usefulness.

The article of District Division is the first matter to be arranged. It will be useful to exhibit our examples on a large scale, which may be contracted at pleasure, since the principle adapts itself with the utmost facility to

churches of all dimensions. Suppose then a church of six hundred members: let it be divided into six districts; let the chapel, and its immediate vicinity, constitute one of the six, and be considered as the first and chief district.

1. Let this first district be selected as the object of an experiment, the rest being left, for the present, untouched.

2. Let the names and addresses of the members of this first district next be registered, in each case specifying the age, occupation, state and condition of the parties.

3. Let a night then be fixed for a *Weekly Meeting* of the members of this district, and their families, and of all who choose, or can be prevailed upon to attend. This meeting shall be held in the chapel vestry, if sufficiently capacious, or in such school-room as may be at hand.

4. This first district shall, for a season, be viewed in the light of a *Model Station*, and a *School of Agency;* and it is, therefore, to be considered an object of the utmost moment, to bring it up to the highest pitch of completeness. It is especially important, at the outset, to commit no false step, but to present the whole in the most favourable attitude, and the most attractive aspect. The pastor must, therefore, intensely devote his entire attention to the experiment, and at the weekly meetings, unless unavoidably detained, he must always preside in person.

5. The pastor shall next select, from each of the six districts, three of the most intelligent, judicious, and devout men he can find; and to this body, who shall

be henceforth denominated district helpers,* during the experimental period, the exercises of the weekly meeting shall be limited.

6. The weekly meeting shall be thus conducted:—The minister shall give out a hymn, and a helper engage in prayer; the minister shall then read a portion of Scripture, on which three helpers in succession shall make remarks according to the following method:—The strain of the first speaker shall be chiefly expository—that of the second, experimental—and that of the third, practical. Then the minister shall take up the subject; and, after such statements as he deems proper, apply the whole, concluding with a hymn, prayer, and the benediction. The passage for the next meeting is always to be intimated by the pastor at the close of the preceding one. The three speakers are, also, to be the helpers of each district in rotation; and if, on any occasion, an individual find that he cannot attend, he shall provide as a substitute one of the helpers of another district. The three helpers shall speak in the order of seniority; that is, the first in years shall take the exposition—the second, the experience—and the third, the practice.

7. With respect to time, this rule shall be rigidly observed: no speaker shall occupy more than fifteen minutes. From the first, and ever after, it shall be distinctly understood to be the duty of the president, when the time is expired, in some way, to signify the same to the speaker. Neglect of this principle of distribution, from a false delicacy, has been highly injurious to the interests of religious meetings, both public and private, both small and great.

* See Rom. xvi. 3, 9; 1 Cor. xii. 28, xvi. 16.

Order in this matter is every thing. It would also be desirable to commence at seven o'clock in the evening, wherever it is practicable to collect the people. The length of the whole service should be carefully attended to;—an hour and a half ought to be the general rule, and on none but extraordinary occasions should it exceed that period.

8. There shall likewise be a meeting for prayer every Sabbath morning, at seven o'clock, to be continued an hour. One of the body of helpers, in rotation, shall, during the experimental period, preside in this meeting, and ever afterwards the helpers of the district in turn; and the persons to engage shall be chiefly those who are not among the number of the helpers, that the exercise may spread over as many as possible, and that gifts and graces may be cultivated. The presiding helper, for the day, shall read a portion of Scripture, and give out the hymns, in order to secure propriety as to length and selection; and three persons shall offer up prayer within the hour. The prayer of the morning should bear much and chiefly on the coming services of the day, imploring the effusion of the Spirit of the Lord to rest upon the pastor and the people.

9. There shall be at the district station a library of one hundred well-chosen volumes, with a monthly supply of the best magazines, for the use of the members; and the hearers also, on paying two-pence a week, shall share in the privilege. When all the district stations are organized, there shall be as many libraries as stations, and such libraries shall itinerate the round of the stations, remaining at each the space of a year.* A member of the church

* The best method of creating a library is the following:—Let the pastor, from the pulpit, intimate his desire to form a library; let him

shall be appointed to take care of the books, and give them out in the usual manner. It is to be expressly understood, that every member shall use the library; and means shall be taken, as afterwards specified, to see that they profit by it.

10. There shall also be a well-stored tract depository at each station, the stock of which, after a year's service, shall itinerate the round of the stations along with the libraries.

11. The members of the district shall constitute a body of visiters and tract distributers. Every member, rich or poor, being a householder, shall receive, monthly, a proper supply for distribution; and they shall be taught to go about this labour of love with great zeal and great prudence. Each visiter must confine himself chiefly to his own immediate vicinity, and not take a larger district than can be properly managed. This must be carefully attended to, and means of a systematic character adopted

offer one book for every four that shall be presented by the church and congregation; and, in a few weeks, this great object may easily be accomplished. There are many congregations without libraries, where, by this means, the want might be immediately supplied without the slightest difficulty or injury. What a multitude of books are slumbering in the libraries of the older pastors, and the wealthier families of our churches, which, if collected, and converted into one general congregational library, or divided into district libraries, might bring forth much fruit to the glory of Christ! This method, combined with the proceeds of two public collections for the object, to be expended by the pastor in the second-hand book shops, will suffice to raise a respectable and useful library, to which additions will be made, from time to time, by donations, subscriptions, occasional collections, or forfeits. Let this library be divided according to the number of the stations, and each portion transferred to its own district.

We have known two instances of this method being adopted with complete success. The pastor appointed from the pulpit certain nights, when he sat in the vestry, and with his own hand wrote in each volume the donor's name.

to secure the regular occupation of the local territory. He must also be apprized, that the mere *exchange of the tracts* is not all his business, but only a very small part of it. The visiters must make it the occasion of far higher efforts, and labour with skill and assiduity, to obtain conversation with their neighbours, and to gain their confidence. They must do their utmost to bring them to the religious services at the station, already mentioned, and others afterwards specified; and also to lead their children to the district Sunday-school. The value of these services of the visiters, well conducted, can hardly be estimated.

12. The members of the district shall each subscribe, at least, one penny a week, to the *District Fund*, for defraying the expense of the rent, fire, lighting, and cleaning of the room, as also of the Sunday-school, of the magazines for the library, and of other incidental matters. This subscription shall be paid to the helpers at the close of the weekly meetings, or at such other periods as may suit the convenience of parties.

13. When the system is brought into full operation at the Model Station, and the bulk of the church has become convinced of the importance of the measure, and begun to long for its general adoption—which may require a space of twelve months, more or less, according to circumstances;—then there shall be a break-up, and a dispersion and settlement of the body of helpers, among their several districts, in each of which, a room, properly situated, is to be erected or procured, and fitted up in a manner equally adapted to public worship or to school instruction. It may now be presumed, that they have

acquired sufficient experience to proceed, under the general guidance of the pastor, after the example of the Model Station.

14. Of the trained helpers, now located in each district, the pastor shall choose one to be the chief or superintendent of the station, who shall act, in all things, as his assistant; and, as such, shall preside at the weekly meetings. This chief helper, or superintendent, shall also be the treasurer of the district, paying all expenses, and transferring the balance, if any, at the close of the year, to the deacons, for the use of the poor.

15. The exercises shall be carried on at each district station, after the same manner as they had been conducted, during the experimental period, at the Model Station; the chief helper shall act the pastor's part, and his colleagues in office shall take a principal share in the service; but the chief helper shall make it a point, by degrees, to bring forward proper persons, among the ordinary brethren, to participate in the exercises, that cultivation may spread, and the competent agency, on the station, be augmented as largely as possible. For a time, it may be proper, that *both* the common helpers should speak at every weekly meeting, that one of the members should offer the opening prayer, and that another should be the third speaker. As, however, the members improve, it may sometimes be right that only one common helper should speak, and that the ordinary members should conduct the rest of the service. When the system is fairly established, the chief helper shall form a list and a plan, under the pastor's direction, of all the persons who are

accustomed to participate in the exercises, on the same principle as the Wesleyan Methodists' local preachers' plan. This step will prevent at once favouritism and confusion, and secure a fair distribution of the district employment.

16. The nights of the weekly meeting, at each station, must be so arranged as not to clash with the night of the weekly lecture at the chapel; the usual weekly Monday prayer meeting will now be merged in the weekly meeting of the first or chapel district; but, on the first Monday of every month, there shall be a general special prayer meeting at the chapel, for the spread of the Gospel; and on that night, there shall be no service at any other station. During the other weeks of the month, supposing the weekly lecture to be on Wednesday, the arrangements may stand thus:—There shall be on Monday, the meeting of the first and chief station, viz. that of the chapel; on Tuesday, that of the second station; on Thursday, those of the third and fourth stations; and on Friday, those of the fifth and sixth stations. The more they are spread over the week the better; for by this means, members, who have leisure, may attend more meetings than that of their own district, and it will prove a great convenience as it respects the attendance of the pastor; for in this way he could attend one or other of the meetings with frequency, and when he so attends, he will of course always preside.

17. Every fourth weekly meeting, at each station, henceforth to be called the *Monthly Meeting*, shall be specially set apart for prayer, and the business of the station. The first hour shall be occupied with devotion, and then, strangers retiring, business shall commence. The pastor,

as president, shall bring forward the several subjects in the following order :—

First. *Health.*—The visiters shall report upon the cases of sick members, if any, during the month. Fresh cases, of serious illness, if any, shall be announced, and persons nominated to visit them ; but kind and tender attentions to sick members are not to be limited to such persons as are thus nominated. The members of the district generally, but especially those of nearest residence, are also expected, more or less, to visit afflicted brethren and sisters. By this means, the neglect of even the poorest and most obscure member will be prevented, and rendered impossible. To all the distressed, of the household of faith, the consolations of the Gospel, and the blessings of Christian fellowship, will thus be amply supplied, and fully secured; and the pastor, while aided in bearing an otherwise overwhelming burden, will, at the same time, know the condition of his flock nearly as well as that of his own family. Visitation, however, is not to be confined to the members, but shall extend to all, in the district, who are accustomed to receive tracts, and attend the services at the chapel and the stations.

Second. *Tracts.*—The tracts, which have been in circulation during the last month, shall be exchanged, and reports made of any occurrences that may merit notice. With a view to stimulus, the pastor shall inquire whether any of the members have succeeded, in the course of the month, to obtain scholars—to induce any of their neighbours to attend the meetings, or to become subscribers to the library, and whether any case of usefulness has been discovered.

Third. *Library.*—The pastor shall next inquire of two or three of the members, what books they have been reading in the course of the month; what was the scope and object of the authors; and like questions. This simple measure will be found to act as a powerful excitement to steady and industrious application, and to a careful gathering-up of the fragments of time. It must not be known, beforehand, who is to be thus interrogated; and the questions are principally to be pressed upon teachers, catechists, expositors, and the younger portion of the members. The value of this plan will be found great; nothing more will be required to promote a most profitable diligence, such as is not often, at present, seen in the bulk of young persons among us. It will also add to the interest and instruction of the meeting.

Fourth. *Finances.*—The helpers shall then settle and arrange their pecuniary affairs, and receive any arrears of weekly subscriptions which may have arisen during the month, at the close of which such matters must always be settled.

18. A church, of the magnitude of which we now speak, viz. of 600 members, is too large for the proper superintendence of any one pastor, whatever be his abilities, energies, or zeal. Every such church can well afford to provide an able assistant for him—not a colleague, but an assistant. Three services could then be carried on, each Sabbath-day, and also the whole of the machinery which we are now constructing, worked easily, and yet with the vigour essential to efficiency.

19. The monthly meetings of the stations shall be so arranged and spread over the month, that either the pastor, or his assistant, may always be enabled to attend

and preside. This is essential to the prosperity, efficiency, and perpetuity of the District system. In the absence of this, success will not, cannot, be generally realized. This is one of the conditions of that success—a condition founded in the nature of man, and in the constitution of Christian society. With an assistant, there will be no difficulty in accomplishing it; and, with proper management, even without an assistant, and in the large church here supposed, there will be nothing impracticable, nor even very onerous; and, in churches of moderate numbers, there will be no hardship whatever.

Such is an outline of our first field of lay labour, and of the proper method of its cultivation—an outline so simple, that it admits of universal adoption, and so pregnant with practical results, that it is hardly possible to over-estimate its value. The universal introduction of this simple plan, with its agency, and the zealous working out of it, will, in a few years, change the entire face of our churches.* Although but a single department of our scheme, it yet applies lay agency to an extent so vast, that

* In reference to religious societies generally, and more especially to those established by Mr. Walker, of Truro, the celebrated James Hervey thus writes—"It is an admirable plan! I would have endeavoured, had my health permitted my attendance, to have formed one of the same kind at Northampton. I heartily wish so useful an institution was more known, and well established in all the principal towns in this kingdom; as I am persuaded such a society must be productive of great good, and in some degree revive the drooping interest of Christianity wherever it was prudently managed."—*Hervey's Letters, CXXXII.*

That the societies of Mr. Walker were productive of great good, is matter of historic certainty. This circumstance is the more demonstrative of the essentially beneficial character of all such associations, however imperfect may be the method of conducting them; for we have never met with any thing of the sort, so very defective as the scheme of Mr. Walker.

the whole church becomes one mass of moving power. It applies that agency, too, in a manner so safe, that it is scarcely possible to conceive how collision or derangement can, by any means, arise, or the slightest mischief ensue. It likewise provides, in the amplest measure, for all that constitutes the real strength, and all that is necessary to promote the Christian comfort, and collective welfare, of the church, and her preparation for Evangelical usefulness. By this process, Scripture knowledge will spread like a swelling tide over a Christian fellowship—a mutual acquaintance, and a religious sympathy, hitherto unknown among us, will be the uniform, universal, and infallible result of its adoption. The intellectual and moral statistics, too, of every church, will be fully and practically ascertained. The shepherd and his flock will also be brought together, in a manner wholly new, and, as it relates to both parties, fraught with consequences of the most profitable character.

This scheme will likewise greatly affect the spirituality of our churches, by leading to such a measure of social devotion as they have never exhibited or enjoyed. District worship will be attended with numerous advantages to all classes. As matters now stand, there are many obstructions to week-day services, which nothing but District Division can overcome. There is distance, generally—bad roads in the winter, and the frequent inclemency of the season—in many cases, the supposed or real necessity of changing clothes—the cold and cheerless aspect of a large chapel with few people—and the formal, unsocial character, and, to some extent, the wearisome uniformity of the chapel service. All these things, whether to the poor,

or to those in better circumstances, are matters not a little serious, and go far to account for the general state of our week-night services. It is not thus that the god of this world provides for the carnal comfort of his votaries. Were the haunts of vulgar dissipation to be situated as widely apart as chapels, and to make as large a demand on the work-worn and wearied limbs of their infatuated customers;—were their tap-rooms and parlours as large, unpeopled, and uncomfortable, with no fire and little light; —were the exhausted mechanic obliged, by the pride of life and the tyranny of custom, to change his clothing before he crossed the Bacchanalian threshold, and on entering, compelled to remain a silent and unsocial drinker, we might safely dispense with Temperance Societies. Alas! the men who act for Mammon—the masters of taverns, the high priests of the gin temple—know human nature much better than the men who manage the sanctuary of God; and far more abundantly provide for its inherent and innocent necessities, as well as for its artificial and sinful appetites. They make it a study; and nothing is withheld, that property and mechanic skill can supply, to gild the cup of death — to smooth the way to perdition—and to allure mankind to walk therein!

This plan will also, in the most essential respects, prove an auspicious return to the wise and all-productive arrangements of primitive times, when household-worship, and household-fellowship, prevailed over all the earth. To this arrangement, instrumentally, in no small measure, must be ascribed the marvellous diffusion of the Gospel, in the days of the apostles. They spread the celestial fire on every side, and a torch was borne and waved by every

hand. We have reversed the entire process ; and the present state of the churches attests our folly and infatuation. The introduction of district helpers, too, will, to all practical intents, be equivalent to a restoration of the primitive plurality of elders. This body will greatly diminish the pastoral burdens, and as greatly augment the popular welfare. The oversight of the flock, now, of hard necessity, so partial and imperfect, in large churches, will then be thorough and complete. Thus, likewise, surrounded by his helpers, the Congregational pastor will resemble, for every useful purpose, the primitive bishop in the midst of his presbyters ;—he will recover his proper attitude, and present, in a good degree, a practical likeness of the Apostolic Episcopacy. The strength of the church, and the security of the pastor, will thus be conjointly realized. The Congregational minister, at the present time, is, for the most part, in a false position. He stands too much alone ; and, as a " king who is without a senate and a nobility, though more absolute, is less safe ;"* so the Congregational minister has lost in real security, what he has gained in seeming authority. The Apostolic presbyters, encircling their president, formed a body of strength more calculated to resist the occasional tumults of the people. The District system, and the body of helpers here specified, would exceedingly augment both the peace and the prosperity of our churches. This system would, likewise, go far to cure a great evil, now occasionally occurring among Independent churches—viz. lay lordship exercised in the person of deacons. The position of these officers is almost universally false and

* Bacon.

perverted. Their real scriptural function is, in a great measure, merged in a mass of multifarious secularities. The modern Congregational deacon is a person very different from those ordained by the Apostles. Congregational usage—how opposite soever the theory—has accorded to the deaconship an amount of power, and invested it with a variety of duties, for which the word of God presents neither authority nor example. The consequence of this error is often most disastrous. It is high time to reduce this office to its scriptural dimensions and functions. The introduction of helpers and district division will furnish the best possible antidote to the evil. Let us have a separate body of men for our church temporalities. Let us restore the "governments" of the Apostolic age, whom Scott (we think justly) considers to have been persons "qualified to preside over the secular affairs of the church, as governors." The despotism of the deaconship has arisen solely from the monopoly that has been thrust upon them, by thoughtless churches and unwitting pastors. The entire secularities of the church ought to be managed by a body separate from the deaconship—a body exclusively composed of church members—men of enlightened and ardent piety—of practical knowledge—of firmness and decision of character—of prudence and stability—of zeal and benevolence—of unspotted public reputation, and, if possible, possessing some measure of worldly respectability. The chief helpers, or superintendents of districts, would, on many accounts, form an appropriate body for this work, or a chief portion of it.

A plan which brings to the church benefits so great and various, may, at first sight, be supposed to possess

but little of an aggressive character, as it respects the world. This is a great mistake;—it is aggressive in the highest degree. It assails the world at so many points, and by so many means, and these means so unostentatious, so intimately associated with Christian kindness and personal contact, that, in point of natural adaptation, they stand unrivalled. This scheme is particularly suited to large towns and cities, and is almost the only method of acting upon them, instrumentally, with a force and a skill suited to the arduous character of the conflict. The City missionary, or any agent similarly situated, solitary and unsupported by pastor, church, or visiters, is the very image of insulated impotence, compared with the organized might of the District system, wielding the embodied agency above described.

The fact of the immense utility of the principle of this scheme, conducted even in a very defective manner, has been attested by every pen which has been called to record the wonders of grace. Adverting to a day of much Divine power, in New England, and to the means approved of God in the great work, the president of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, says—"Meetings for conference, or for exhortation and prayer, by lay brethren, have been very common, and have been very useful." The same eminent person, drawing upon the experience of the faithful, and combining it with his own, in setting forth the most efficient means of diffusing the knowledge of Christ, and increasing the conversion of men, makes the following emphatic avowal relative to the subject of this section:—"I see no reason why judicious laymen, provided they are experienced Christians, should not, under

the general direction of the pastor, hold neighbourhood meetings in various parts of a congregation. In this manner, multitudes in every place, and especially in large towns, would be brought within the hearing of the Gospel, who never enter a place of worship."*

It may, in conclusion, be confidently anticipated, that, were our plan brought into full operation, in a church of the magnitude we have supposed, a weekly amount of attendance, taking the year round, of little less than six-fold, as compared with that which meets at the chapel on a week night, would be realized at the six stations united. Were the rooms, on an average, to accommodate about 150 people, they would to a certainty be always considerably filled. Warmth and excitement, sociality and comfort, depend less upon the absolute numbers, than upon the proportion which the numbers bear to the house. A crowded meeting contains a never-failing popular charm. But the vast augmentation of worship among the members, during the week, is not all that would be gained by the establishment of District stations;—it would also increase, to an amazing extent, the amount of hearing among those who are still without. Indeed, for purposes of conversion, the present week-night sermons of Congregational ministers are nearly useless. The handfuls who hear are almost wholly made up of church members. Such sermons, accordingly, are of an appropriate character, and not at all suited to the work of conversion. In the course of a long ministry, few pastors can refer to a single

* Dr. Wayland's Letter to Dr. Sprague, whose admirable lectures on Revivals of Religion, with the exquisite Introduction of Dr. Redford and Mr. James, and the mass of precious materials appended to them, ought to be in every Congregational library.

convert from week-night lectures. For six days, therefore, our labours are all but a blank with respect to the world; all that is really efficient for purposes of conversion, in the way of instrumentality, is confined to one day in the week. How lamentable a state of things! What a waste of pastoral life and labour! If we wish extensively to promote the edification of the faithful, or the salvation of the lost, we must adopt other means than those now employed; and there are none equal to those which are based upon the principle of the District system.

SECTION III.

OF THE CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH AS THE SECOND DEPARTMENT.

THE evangelical labours of every Congregational church ought to commence at the fireside of its own members. This hallowed spot lies nearest the heart; there the currents of life and love flow deep and strong; and there, in the order equally of nature, of grace, and of duty, should begin the labours of compassion for immortal souls. This is a matter of most vital concern, both to parents and to churches, while both are in the utmost danger of not adequately appreciating the importance which really attaches to it. The subject is apt to be overlooked, from its seeming insignificance. It ought, however, to be remembered, that, although it is only the *first* movement in

the march of benevolence, and bears the aspect of a very humble enterprise, it is not the least step, but the greatest in the series—it being that upon which the whole depends. Families are not only the nurseries of the commonwealth, but also of the church. There, in a great measure, the die is cast both for time and for eternity. The religious arrangements of a Christian family are, no doubt, primarily a parental concern; nor let parents deem the work of training their infant offspring, ignoble; for if, during a long life-time, they had effected no other good than the proper education of their children, they have not lived in vain. They have performed, at least, the first and greatest social duty. The Christian culture of such children, however, is not the province of parents only; it is also the first duty of every Congregational church. Neglect or failure, in reference to this great work, will, from age to age, entail upon the churches of Christ feebleness and inefficiency in every movement, whether domestic or foreign, for the salvation of souls. This circumstance alone suffices to account for much at present existing among them, that cannot be contemplated without regret and alarm.

It is, however, no marvel, that there is such a deficiency in point of practice, in reference to this matter; for it is clear that there exists in the minds of many Christians, and even of churches, generally, no set or system of well-defined principles upon it. The real position, claims, and duties of the children of believers, is a subject seldom discussed, and very imperfectly understood. In our times, it has obtained, even among Congregational churches, but little attention, compared with its merits: it has never

really become the theme of careful and searching inquiry. The case was much otherwise in the days of our fathers. The present prevalent neglect is the more remarkable, since the question is most intimately connected with the ordinance of baptism, on which there has been so much controversy; and yet, amid the wide-spread, prolonged, and fierce collision, which has prevailed respecting that ordinance, no light, beyond a few feeble sparks, has been struck out on this all-important subject. The result is, that ignorance of principles, and negligence of practice, in reference to it, with a few partial exceptions, reign among churches, with united sovereignty, over all the land. Whether we look to the English or Scottish Independents, we behold the same evil, and that evil existing and operating nearly to the same extent. Numbers of pastors, among these two bodies, differ respecting the grounds, and the proper subjects, of infant baptism; but in all that follows the administration of the ordinance, there is between them a most harmonious and unanimous negligence of their baptised children. From the time at which the ordinance is administered and the names registered, there is apparently, on the part of pastors and churches, an end of all concern, control, and even connection. As the children grow up, they are wholly left to their parents and to themselves. The parents, meanwhile, may do their duty to the children, or they may not;—pastors and churches ask no questions. As the children advance in years, they may continue to accompany their parents to the house of prayer, or they may wander from the fold, and draw back unto perdition; still pastors and churches, as such, ask no questions. No voice of compassionate warning is

lifted up—no messenger of mercy rushes to the rescue—no church, in its associated capacity, at all cares or labours as it ought for their souls. If the children voluntarily attend the Sunday-schools attached to the church, or a Bible-class, they share the common benefit; but if they do neither, no steps are taken in consequence—they are left to act just as they please.

If, at some future period, the children of the members thus baptised should happily feel the constraining power of a Saviour's love, and express a desire for fellowship, they must apply in the same manner as the children of the alien and the stranger, and pass through the usual formalities as much as the unbaptised offspring of a heathen man or a publican. They are received as from the world—as persons between whom and the church, there has been neither bond nor union, connection nor relation. All the difference between them and a candidate from Caffreland is simply this:—in their case there is no fresh administration of the ordinance of baptism. Now is it so, that infant baptism amounts only to this? Is it merely that baptism, in childhood, will prevent the trouble or necessity of baptism at full age, in the case of children who may afterwards make a public profession of the faith of the Gospel? Is this all? Has this constituted the whole of the ground of a controversy, which has for ages occupied and agitated the Christian world? Is it only for this, that so many friendships have been dissolved, and so many churches distracted or destroyed? Is this all the reason that can be assigned for a step so serious, an evil so great, as the separation of those who are agreed upon every other point, into two communi-

ties — the Independents and the Baptists? If this be all, surely temper and party-spirit have had more to do with the controversy than truth!

"It may seem strange," said Baxter, "that after 1625 years' use of Christian baptism, the ministers of the Gospel should be yet unresolved to whom it doth belong; yet so it is."* The wonder has increased by the addition of more than two centuries, at the close of which, not a few, who minister in holy things, are on this point still unresolved. Although the question lies at the very foundation of the subject under immediate consideration, we cannot now stop to attempt any arbitrament between parties, who differ both as to the grounds, the subjects, and the object, of infant baptism; and, therefore, leaving for the present every man to be satisfied in his own mind, and to act upon his own convictions of duty, we take each class upon their own ground, and proceed to charge them both with an unworthy occupation of it.

First, we address ourselves to those who take the more limited view, and confine baptism to the children of believers, or to children, one at least of whose parents is a professor of faith in the Son of God, and either in actual fellowship, or admissible to the same. You contend, that the children of the faithful occupy a position, and sustain a relation to the church of Christ, very different from the position and relation of children whose parents have neither confessed the Lord, nor received the truth. You maintain this on the ground of covenant promise, and covenant connection; and you insist, that hence arises the peculiar "advantage" of the offspring of believers. You further

* Second Disputation, p. 41.

assert, that hence, too, proceeds the "profit"* of baptism; and that, on this ground alone, can it be consistently administered to infants. You also hold, that such infants are already in the church, and a part of the church, members of a certain standing; that their baptism was only a public recognition and ratification of their antecedent membership, a sign of purity, and a seal of the covenant. Well, if they be young disciples, why are they not diligently instructed in the things that belong to their peace? If they be junior members, why are they not subjected, for their good, to the discipline and government of the church of Christ? Why are they not carefully informed, from earliest years, of their duties and relations to the church of which they are component parts? Why is not full fellowship pointed out to them, as the first duty, and the highest honour, attainable on earth? Why are they not encompassed with a system of means, of such an order as constantly to remind them, that they are not as other children, and that they must maintain a deportment corresponding with their relation to the church of God?

We next address those who entertain more enlarged views of the application of the ordinance. Several shades of opinion prevail among you, as a class, respecting the grounds of infant baptism; but you all unite in one point —you connect the ordinance uniformly and emphatically with instruction "in the way of the Lord." By whom then is that instruction to be communicated? You know that, in an immense majority of instances, in which you administer the ordinance of baptism, it is not, and that, in many cases, it cannot be communicated by the parents;

* Rom. iii. 1.

and you know that, as churches and pastors, it is not communicated by you. A multitude of those whose children you baptise, have neither the will nor the power to educate their offspring. You know that they have not; and that they are, as families, living without God, and that, as individuals, they have no well-founded hope in the world. You nevertheless baptize their infants, and yet, for the most part, take no further notice of them; you claim, however, no hold upon them, and you really possess none.

The whole of this lamentable business is open to much observation, but we forbear: suffice it to say, that this order of things cannot always last, and should be immediately abandoned. It surrenders the whole argument for infant baptism; for it exhibits the ordinance, applied to children, as an idle and unmeaning ceremony. It does more; it is fraught with boundless mischief to the souls of men, by its uniform and inevitable tendency to help on a mortal delusion respecting their personal salvation. It is, therefore, high time for Pædobaptist churches to awake out of sleep, and to perform their duty. Both the parties to whom we have referred, the one as taking a more limited, the other a more enlarged view, are under condemnation, though not both to the same extent. Whether they found the argument for infant baptism on covenant relation between parent and child, or on a capability of receiving instruction—in either case, the obligation is at least binding, to impart a sufficient portion of saving knowledge, and to subject them to watchful oversight; and neglect, in either case, is both culpable and perilous. This is the lowest light in which the subject can be put; but, considered in the view of covenant rela-

tion, that subject acquires an awful importance, an overpowering solemnity; and deep is the guilt of such as hold this view, and yet neglect the duties thence arising!

It is not the least wonderful part of the matter, and it is a singular fact, that eminent Pædobaptist writers, of various countries and communities, have recorded their candid confession of the prevalence of this pernicious negligence in their respective sections of the Christian church. These confessions would fill a volume, but the following passages may suffice:—

"I am verily persuaded there is utterly a fault among us upon this subject. The pastors, in public and in private, ought to press upon parents the fulfilment of their trust, and upon children the improvement of their privileges; to ascertain, by visits from house to house, the state of domestic instruction, and, with affectionate fidelity, to commend or admonish accordingly;—and, by occasional or stated meetings, of a more public kind, of the children, for example, of different districts of local residence, to stimulate both children and parents."*

"Every church is bound to require such parents as are members of it, to instruct and govern their children. Every church is bound to see that this is actually done, and to call to a solemn account all its members who neglect or violate these duties. Ministers ought to make it a business of their ministerial office, to unfold to them their relations to God and his church, and solemnly to enforce the duties arising from this relation. This, I apprehend, should be done not only in the pulpit, but in a regular course of laborious catechetical instruction. The

* Dr. Wardlaw on Baptism.

same things should be enjoined, from time to time, on their parents, one of whose first duties it is, to co-operate faithfully with their minister in teaching and enjoining these things upon their children. Were these things begun, as soon as children are capable of understanding them, and pursued throughout every succeeding period of their nonage, a fair prospect would be opened for the vigorous growth, and abundant fruitfulness, of this nursery of the church. In my opinion, it is a part of the duty of each church, at their evangelical conversation and prayer, to summon the baptised persons, who are minors, to be present at convenient seasons, while the church offers up prayer peculiarly for them. Were all these things faithfully done, a new face would, in a great measure, be put upon the condition of the persons in question. It must be acknowledged, that much less attention is paid to them in modern than in ancient times, at least by churches in general; and less, I think, by ourselves than by our ancestors." *

"The great body of Pædobaptist churches have much to reform, in regard to their treatment of baptised children; and are bound to address themselves to that reform, with all speed and fidelity. The church is bound carefully to watch over the education, and especially the religious education of her youthful members; and, just in proportion as she has been faithful to this part of her trust, she has flourished in orthodoxy, piety, and peace. A very large part of her duty, as a church, consists in constant and faithful attention to the moral and religious culture of the rising generation. Allowing to the fullest extent

* Dr. Dwight on Baptism.

the duty of parents, yet the church has a duty to perform, which is seldom realized. It is hers, by her pastor and eldership, to stimulate parents—to see that proper schools for the baptised youth are formed and selected—to put the Bible, and suitable catechisms and other compends of religious truth, into their hands—to convene them, at stated intervals for instruction, exhortation, and prayer—to point out their duty to receive the Saviour, and join the church. If this plan were faithfully pursued, with our baptised youths, I concur with the pious Baxter in believing, that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, our children would grow up dutiful and sober, orderly and serious, and, before they reached mature age, recognise their membership by a personal act, with sincerity and edification." *

Parents, pastors, churches! how long is this state of things to remain? How long are we to hear such lamentations as those just recited, and see them followed by no practical measures? May not the time past suffice for your guilty slumbers? Oh! what disastrous results to churches, to families, and to myriads of youth have flowed from your bygone supineness! How vast the individual sin and misery—how grievous the domestic distraction and parental disappointment—how great the congregational impoverishment and national loss, that have issued from your treacherous negligence! How loud and piercing is the cry for reformation! Can that reform be

* Dr. Miller, Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, America, on Baptism—a work which contains some admirable views on the practical bearings of the subject.

longer delayed? Oh! what a field for Christian philanthropy and holy zeal is presented by the baptized youth of the Congregational Churches of England and Wales! How long shall it remain over-run with thorns and briers? Are not its claims prior to those of all other fields, however urgent? How preposterous then it is, to walk blindfolded over it, as it lies shrouded in its desolation, and to commence your evangelical efforts in the regions beyond!

Thoroughly to cultivate this juvenile territory, through all its gradations of rank and age, from infancy to opening manhood, will, of course, require much system, much agency, and considerable liberality on the part of our churches; but, at whatever cost, this great matter must engage the attention of the Congregational body a hundred-fold more than it has ever yet done. The whole system of things, respecting the children of members, as it now exists among the bulk of even Dissenting churches, is seriously defective; and the religious tuition of youth, in general, is feebly conducted, and attended with but small results. The foundation is almost every where neglected, or not laid in a proper manner; and, in too many cases, there is no superstructure whatever raised upon it. But, if human nature is to be assailed with success, it must be attacked in infancy and youth. The millions of adults among us, who have "burst the bonds," and who now bid defiance to heaven and earth, might, to a man, at one time, have been subdued, and brought under the influence of moral and religious culture. The rising race are the hope of the church; her reasonable expectation of reclaiming and saving the mass of the full-grown population is very small; we deem it, therefore,

the more imperative to turn the stream of lay power and effort, very largely, into this most important field, in order to its fertility and cultivation.

Though we have changed the *subject* of the last section, the sphere is the same. In that section, we spoke of members—in this, we discourse of their children; and we claim the rooms at the stations, already provided and established for the edification of the old, as equally a part of our apparatus for the culture of the young. The children of the six districts, formerly specified, are to be trained in the manner following, at every station:—

1. The name, age, and residence of all the children of the members of every district, respectively, shall be registered in a separate book, to be kept at the station for ready reference.

2. A meeting of all the members of each district shall then be held, and immediate steps taken to ascertain the state of Christian education throughout their families; and inquiry shall also be made, whether every child of proper years be receiving *day-school* instruction. In every district, where the neighbourhood is not well supplied with a day-school, measures shall be adopted to establish one for the especial benefit of the children of the members—not exclusive, however, of others—where due attention shall be paid to the moral and spiritual interests of the young.

3. The attention of the members of the district shall then be most urgently called to the subject of the religious training of children. The pulpit shall repeatedly and earnestly press this point upon the heart and conscience of the assembled church, that the brethren of all the

districts may be similarly and simultaneously animated with one view of this great enterprise, that one principle may pervade the whole, and that intelligent harmony may reign in every part.

4. A Sunday-school shall then immediately be opened in the room at the station, specially for the members' children, but open to all that come, who can read with tolerable facility, and to such only. This school shall be taught *exclusively by members of the church,* persons of approved piety and intelligence. To this institution shall be attached a good juvenile library, comprising a large proportion of religious biography, and of publications peculiarly suited to persons in their teens.

5. The next step shall be, the formation of Theological Classes, to be composed of the elder scholars of both sexes, who have advanced beyond Sunday-school pupilage, and all other young persons whom it may be possible to persuade to avail themselves of the benefit. Every class shall be under an appropriate Catechist appointed by the pastor. These classes shall, separately, meet on the Sabbath afternoon, in *private houses,* according to local convenience, each sex by themselves. There shall also be a monthly meeting, on a week night, of all these classes, and their Catechists, in the station-room, for prayer, when the pastor shall meet them, as often as possible, that he may cultivate acquaintance and friendship with them, and endeavour to turn their attention to such subjects as may be deemed appropriate and necessary, to stimulate conscience, and inquiry after the truth—and to help on decision in respect of those things which belong to their peace.

6. These classes, in addition to the use of the juvenile

library, by each paying one penny per week, shall likewise have access to the district library, which shall be furnished with a full set of works on useful knowledge and popular science, specially adapted to their years and condition.

7. There shall be an *exclusively private* quarterly meeting with the pastor, in the station-room, of all the parents of the district who are members, with their children. At this meeting, the duties of domestic instruction and of filial obedience, and the relation of the children to the church, shall be clearly specified, and tenderly pressed. Affectionate, but pointed, addresses, on these occasions, shall be directed by the pastor both to parents and to children ; and special prayer offered up for the salvation of all the youthful band. This quarterly meeting shall be held on one of the monthly nights, to prevent the oppressive increase of pastoral duty. By this means, too, there will be four quarterly and eight monthly meetings, which will throw a beneficial variety into the services of the stations throughout the year. On such occasions the monthly business would, of course, go on at the close, as usual.

8. There shall be at each station a half-yearly tea meeting, composed *exclusively* of the members and their elder children, with the helpers, catechists, teachers, and other functionaries of the district. Suitable exercises shall be carried on, and, at every second meeting, which shall be considered as the annual assembly, there shall be presented a general report on the affairs of the station. At these meetings, the pastor will of course preside.

9. There shall further be an *exclusively private* half-yearly meeting, in the chapel, of all the members of all

the districts, with their children. The afternoon of the Lord's day will generally be the fittest time for this assemblage; that period will ensure a more full attendance than could be commanded on a week night—and, besides, the Sabbath is indispensable to the main point of arrangement, comprised in the next provision.

10. At this half-yearly meeting, shall be solemnly admitted to full communion all those young persons, being children of members, who have become decided in the course of the previous six months. None else, however, but children of members shall be admitted at such meetings; and they shall always be so admitted. At the same time, a list shall be read of any children and youth, the offspring of the members, who may have died in the course of the preceding six months, with statements of any thing that may merit notice. Then shall follow the administration of the Lord's supper, accompanied by suitable addresses from the pastor, and appropriate prayers by the helpers of the districts.

The plan now laid down is both easily and universally practicable; and, by its general adoption, we contend, with Dr. Dwight, that, in a few years, "a new face would, in a great measure, be put upon the condition of the persons in question." Under such a system, it is hardly extravagant, with Richard Baxter and Dr. Miller, to "believe that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, our children would grow up dutiful and sober, orderly and serious; and, before they reached mature age, recognise their membership by a personal act, with sincerity and edification."

It were difficult to set forth in order, the manifold advantages of such a system of arrangement. One point,

however, is of such importance, as to claim special notice. It would bring into practical operation a principle of the utmost moment, in Pædobaptist churches—a principle which is too generally dormant amongst us—while the practice that legitimately results from it is nowhere seen. This great principle is thus laid down in the Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith:—"The visible church, which is also Catholic or Universal, under the Gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children."* The same illustrious body lay it down, in their baptismal service—"That the promise is made to believers and their seed, and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, *born within the church*, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church under the Gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament—the COVENANT of GRACE, for substance, being the same, and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before. That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers, and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and, by their baptism, are bound to fight against, the devil, the world, and the flesh;—that they are Christians, and federally holy, before baptism, and, therefore, are they baptized."†

Such is the true and avowed principle of all real and pure Congregational churches, upon this great constitutional question, however inconsistent may be the present

* Chap. xxv.—Of the Church. † See the Assembly's Directory.

practice of that body. We conceive, that the plan here specified will sustain the principle, and also work it out. It will exemplify our views of the Scripture doctrine of baptism to the world;—it will confirm and uphold the usage of Pædobaptist churches; and it will introduce consistency and harmony into the constitution of Congregational societies. This plan, universally introduced, and vigorously prosecuted, will do more to illustrate the theory, and to recommend the practice, of infant baptism, than all the volumes that can be penned upon it, apart from consistent practice; and, indeed, while the present "mournfully prevalent abuse of the practice of infant baptism"* prevails among the churches, it matters not who writes, nor what is written, in defence of it. The humblest church in the land, that shall, on the contrary, retrace its steps, and adopt the Scripture principle laid down in the Assembly's Confession, and carry it out into practice by this plan, or one similar, will do more for the cause of Pædobaptism than the unsupported pen of a Williams, or a Wardlaw, multiplied by any figure in the numeration table. As things now generally stand, the Pædobaptist theory is altogether without a particle of practice, beyond the affusion of water; it is every way unprofitable, and nothing supports it but blind custom. In works upon the subject, we read of its uses and advantages; but, when we walk abroad among the churches in quest of proof, we nowhere meet with an atom of fact to bear it out. What may be designated the law of the subject, is a dead letter among us. Whether we look at the families, Sunday-schools, and churches of Baptists or of Pædobaptists, we find no difference in

* Wardlaw on Baptism, p. 8.

their economy, with respect to the care, culture, and government of children. We have a fine, a beautiful theory on the subject, but not a whit more of practice than they. We have not even the shadow of a different system of means! No one, who was not otherwise apprized of it, would suppose, from aught that appears in the practical working of the two systems of the Baptists and Pædobaptists, respectively, that there was the slightest dispute between the parties. Whether they both, respectively, proceed with care or with negligence, they both proceed in the same way;—the one party seeming not at all affected by the observance of the rite, nor the other, by its rejection. In the case of the offspring of Baptist parents, if a child become the subject of grace, he is baptized, and received into the church;—in the opposite case, if the child become pious, he is received into the church, without further ceremony. The advantage of infant baptism, under these circumstances, is not easily perceived; but if our principle shall be followed out, and our plan vigorously worked, it will give substance to the language, and evidence to the argument, of the advocates of infant baptism. This plan will treat and train them, from the first, as members of the church—as members of a lower standing who are preparing for the higher fellowship. The result of the system, conducted with devotion and energy, will proclaim the true character of our principle, and go a great way to stop the mouth of the gainsayer.

The introduction of practical consistency upon the subject into our churches, however, is neither the only nor the greatest benefit which will result from embracing and acting

on the above scheme. It will be attended with paramount advantages to both parents and children, to the church, and to the world. It will variously affect the interests of the children. It will uniformly provide a good day-school education—a blessing by no means general, even among the families of Christians, in the lower walks of society. It will secure a thorough religious education, and thus furnish the basis of enlightened piety, and of useful character. It will, as a general rule, be attended with the implantation of religious principle; for, when once the faith and zeal of a church have reached the point necessary, properly to sustain the plan laid down, they will not go unblessed. The Lord's work will speedily appear unto his servants, and his glory unto their children; the beauty of the Lord their God will be upon them, and he will establish the work of their hands. It will also induce religious habits; for it is impossible that children and youth can be subjected to such a process as this scheme exhibits, for the first twenty years of their life, without the formation of a habit, which, in after times, it will be ordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible, wholly to throw off. The value of such habits, who can tell? It will likewise go far towards forming religious companionships, the benefits of which will be felt in all coming years.

Under this plan, the parents will also be the subjects of a diversified and powerful influence. This will prove the most successful of all methods of creating and supporting a sense of duty to the souls of children in the parental bosom. The quarterly meetings at the district stations, and the half-yearly meetings in the chapel, con-

sidered as mere arrangements, will exert a commanding influence upon heads of families; they will operate as keen remembrancers—as pungent reprovers—as powerful instructors. When, to all this, we subjoin the admonitions, and addresses, and prayers, connected with those meetings, the grounds of expected benefit become vastly increased and strengthened. It is far from extravagant to anticipate, that the whole, in a few years, will create a completely new order of feelings, as well as habits, among both parents and children. Sluggish, indeed, must those parents be, whom such a system shall fail to stimulate!

These meetings, and their accompanying services, too, will contribute exceedingly to impress the youthful heart, and to support the authority of parents, and will thus aid them in one of the most important matters, in which it is possible for man either to give or receive assistance. The reiterated and emphatic statements of parental claims upon the love, honour, and obedience of children, made in the presence of their fathers and mothers, is a process in its own nature singularly calculated to produce a deep and indelible impression. Under such an arrangement, how many parental hearts now broken might have been preserved whole, and gladdened by filial affection and filial duty! Nor is this all; from such a plan, parents themselves will derive much personal benefit, in respect of spirituality. These meetings will contribute more than a little to produce an improved state of things with respect to family religion. The very supposition of the existence, and steady observance, of this plan is hardly compatible with the spiritual negligence, and want of domestic government and instruction, which

now prevail in so many professing families. Even where things are now deemed superior, it would make them better; it would every where effect either a reformation or an improvement. Of a certainty, it would either produce more piety, or cause less profession.

It yet remains, to notice another peculiar feature of our scheme, which is—the *authoritative* character of the entire arrangement. The fatal error of our day, and of the Independent denomination, in common with others, is, the absence of proper ecclesiastical discipline among the children of the members; or rather, the utter absence of all discipline. This plan demands of us to act out our principles as already specified. The first of these principles is—that the children of the members are themselves members—"born within the church;"—that by baptism they have been formally "received into the bosom of the visible church;"—that they are thus, and otherwise, "distinguished from the world;"—and that they are hereby "united with believers." * On this position and this relation, we ground our duty to teach and our right to control them, and their obligation to submit to our instruction and government. The laws of God's house do, therefore, extend to the children as much as to the parents. In the first instance, these laws must, of course, be administered chiefly through the parents; while, with growing years, their operation becomes more and more direct and immediate, till they descend, through the regular channel, in all their power and authority, upon the children in common with their parents. In pursuance of this principle, and on the ground of it, we require the

* See page 220.

punctual and universal attendance of the children on all the means of grace established for their welfare, and appropriate to their condition, as much as we require the attendance of the parents on all the established ordinances of religion. This principle is of vital importance. The successful working of the plan for the salvation of the children imperatively demands, that it shall receive universal and cheerful submission. The parents, the pastor, and the church must combine their whole moral might in support of this law. The duty of the children and youth to attend —punctually and perseveringly to attend—on domestic instruction, on the Sunday-schools, the theological classes, the quarterly and half-yearly meetings at the station, as well as the special and ordinary chapel services, with their parents—must be, and continue to be, a matter of settled faith, and of solemn obligation, above all controversy and beyond all disputation.

It must be remembered, also, that the tie which binds the parents to one place and to one pastor is equally binding upon the children, who may not, therefore, rove hither and thither among divers chapels and preachers, as whim may dictate. To do so, is just as much prohibited to the child as to the parent, and is equally injurious to both. This is another legitimate consequence of the same fundamental principle; and when its full operation shall be restored to the churches, it will be attended with effects which no man can fully estimate or foresee. The state of things, with respect to this point, as at present existing among Pædobaptist bodies, is most lamentable; it is enough to expose our theory of infant membership to derision and scorn. The spirit of reform, with regard to

this subject, however, is abroad, and in some quarters operating with vigour: such is the case in certain portions of the Church of England. The exhortations of Dwight and of Miller have also begun to tell across the Atlantic. —"What a beautiful sight is exhibited, in some of the American churches, assembling once a quarter, the baptised children in the body of the church, their guardians in the galleries, and the elders of the church before the pulpit, and the pastor addressing them, severally, upon their obligations!"* Surely it is time for the churches of England to awake, to put on their strength, and to labour as for life, by all approved means, for the salvation of their children.

"This subject shows how solemn and how responsible is the situation of those young persons, who have been in their infancy dedicated to God in holy baptism! This is a point, concerning which both old and young are too often forgetful. It is generally conceded and extensively felt, that parents, by dedicating their children to God in this ordinance, are brought under very weighty obligations, which cannot be forgotten by them without incurring great guilt. But young people seldom lay to heart as they ought, that their early reception of the seal of God's covenant, in consequence of the act of their parents, places them in circumstances of the most solemn and responsible kind. They are too apt to imagine that they are not members of the church, until by some act of profession, of their own, they are brought into this relation, and assume its bonds; and that their making this profession, or not making it, is a matter of mere choice, left to

* Christian Observer, April, 1828.

their own decision; that by omitting it they violate no tie, contract no guilt; that by refraining, they leave themselves more at liberty, and that the only danger consists in making an insincere profession.

"This is a view of the subject which, however common, is totally and most criminally erroneous. *The children of professing Christians are already in the church. They were born members.* Their baptism did not *make* them such. It was a public ratification of their membership, and a recognition of it. They were baptized because they *were* members. They received the seal of the covenant, because they were already in covenant, by virtue of their birth. This blessed privilege is their 'birth-right.' Of course, then, the only question they can ask themselves, is not—'Shall we enter the church, and be connected with Christ's family?' but—'Shall we continue in it, or act the part of ungrateful deserters? Shall we be thankful for the privilege, and gratefully recognise and confirm it by our own act; or shall we renounce our baptism, disown and deny a Saviour in whose name we have been enrolled as members of his family, and become open apostates from that family?'

"This is the real question to be decided, and truly a solemn question it is! Baptized young people! think of this: you have been in the bosom of the church ever since you drew your first breath. The seal of God's covenant has been placed upon you. You cannot, if you would, escape from the responsibility of this relation! You may forget it; you may hate to think of it; you may despise it; but still the obligation lies upon you; you cannot throw it off. Your situation is solemn beyond

expression! On the one hand, to go forward and recognise your obligation by a personal profession, without any love to the Saviour, is to insult him by a heartless offering; and on the other, to remove your allegiance by refusing to acknowledge him, by turning your back on his ordinances, and by indulging in that course of life by which his religion is dishonoured, is, certainly, whether you realize it or not, to deny him before men, and to incur the fearful guilt of apostacy, of drawing back unto perdition!"*

SECTION IV.

OF THE CONGREGATION AS THE THIRD DEPARTMENT.

Among Congregational churches, it is considered that, on an average, hearers stand to members as fully three to one. † These persons, with their families, ought to constitute an object of primary and extreme solicitude. In the order of nature and of place, they stand next to the children of the members. Assuming, as we safely may, the general accuracy of the above proportion, and that it is under rather than over, we have here the appalling fact of three-fourths of the whole mass of our Independent assemblies persevering in the refusal to receive and to confess the Son of God, and to be separated to

* Dr. Miller on Baptism.

† Dr. Redford says four to one. Introductory Essay to Sprague, p. xix.

his service. Is it not time to inquire into this matter, and into the condition and prospects of these multitudes? There are several aspects in which they ought to be contemplated.

They may be considered, first, in relation to their *spiritual state.* They have exercised faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, or they have not. Little doubt remains as to their real condition. With a number of exceptions, these multitudes are without God, and have no hope in the world. Living and dying in their present state, we can anticipate for them nothing but "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish!" They have but a little of the form of godliness; they know nothing of its power;—and yet there is ground to fear, that most of them indulge the conceit, that "the people of the Lord, the people of the Lord" are they. Many things, to which churches are parties, have contributed to originate and support this perilous delusion.

We must, therefore, secondly, consider them in relation to the *ordinance of baptism.* The majority of the multitudes of whom we speak are wholly ignorant of the real nature of this rite, and of the personal obligations which it involves. A general and undefined notion, however, extensively prevails among them, and operates with deadly power, by inducing the confidence, that it constitutes them Christians of a certain standing, and brings along with it security against final condemnation. Nor can it be otherwise; an ordinance, so abused by them in respect of their children, is not likely to be rightly understood as applied to themselves. The Popish feeling, too, both upon this and other momentous subjects, which still rests like

a cloud upon the parishes of the Establishment, as it may be supposed, operates to a great extent even among the congregations of Nonconformity. This matter, therefore, must be made far more clear than it is at present to our congregations. It must be repeated and explained, till understood, that it is not until, with a penitent heart, they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that baptism "verily profiteth." Without intermission must it be urged upon them, that religion is a personal affair, and that, until they cordially embrace the Saviour, their baptism, in infancy, remains only an accident of their birth—an act of others to which they were no parties, and from which they can derive no safety, notwithstanding the privileges which it implies, and the corresponding obligations which it involves. It ought to be incessantly pressed upon them, that "in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;"—that "in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love;"—and that "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." All this ought to be done the more earnestly, forasmuch as circumcision did not operate more fatally among the Jews, than baptism does among the millions of Britain. It is clear, from the language of the apostle just recited, that he considered circumcision, simply viewed as a rite, as a most insignificant matter; and, unquestionably, had he found men abusing baptism as the Jews did circumcision, he would have solemnly told them, that neither did baptism avail any thing nor the want of baptism, but regeneration by the

Holy Spirit, repentance towards God, faith in the blood of Christ, and obedience to his commandments. What he would have done in our circumstances, we should do. Circumcision, in its own place, was a matter of the greatest moment, and so is baptism; but when it ceases to be a shadow, and is converted into the substance—when instead of a sign and a seal, it is made a substitute for the blood of Christ, for a new heart and a right spirit, the error must be exposed with unsparing fidelity.

There is another method of exhibiting the subject, with considerable force. Does it admit of any doubt, that, had not these multitudes been baptised in infancy, they would not, in their riper years, have either sought or submitted to the baptismal ordinance? The fact of their baptism in infancy, therefore, is not to be construed as an act of homage or obedience, on their part, to the authority of Christ, since were the act still to be performed, they would refuse compliance. Let them be closely shut up to this conclusion. Here, then, we have masses of immortal creatures claiming to be considered as Christians, while in a state of mind which would refuse to give that proof—a very slender and equivocal proof—of penitence, or faith, or respect for the authority of Christ, which is implied in submission to the introductory ordinance of his church! The argument, therefore, is this:—No man can, in his heart, as in the sight of God, respect the ordinance of baptism, who despises or neglects that of the supper; forasmuch as a devout and conscientious observance of the latter, is absolutely necessary to a personal ratification of the parental act, with respect to the former.

We must, therefore, proceed, thirdly, to view the state of these multitudinous masses, in connection with the *Lord's supper*. This, in some measure, is the testing ordinance of modern times; it is, at least, a negative test, which will too generally hold true. The obligation of all believers to observe it, rests on the clear, positive precept of the Head and Lawgiver of the church, who hath said, —"This do in remembrance of me." The recorded, undisputed, universal practice of the first churches, shows how, under the guidance of inspired men, they understood the injunction. It is proved, that they, one and all, attended to it literally, and that they did so as an act of obedience to Jesus Christ. Here the principle of obedience is immutable, and it rests upon the fact that no explicit, decided profession of the Gospel can be made, without visible communion with the followers of the Lamb, in all the ordinances of his house. The observance of the Lord's supper is as imperatively binding on every disciple of Christ, as the observance of the Lord's day. Nay, his pleasure respecting the observance of the former is far more clear and explicit than respecting that of the latter: of the Sabbath he hath not said—"This do in remembrance of me." The observance of the Sabbath rests chiefly on the fact, that it was the practice of the apostolic churches, which unquestionably has all the force of a command; but for the observance of the supper, there is, in addition to this, the solemn mandate of the Son of God, to commemorate his dying love. The reasons for this superior regard to the ordinance of the supper are as obvious as they are weighty and affecting. The believer's duty, therefore, on this point, is most explicit, most imperative,

and of uniform, universal obligation; and, consequently, if men who profess to be disciples decline obedience to the command, considered as a privilege, let them remember, that it is also a duty, binding on every believer in the Son of God, from age to age—a duty, therefore, which assumes a previous union of believers in Christian fellowship.

Neglect of the ordinance of the supper, then, is disobedience to one of the most solemn and momentous commands of the Son of God; the parties so acting are guilty of "denying the Lord that bought them," before an ungodly world, and they may well tremble, lest he, in turn, deny them before his Father in Heaven! All such persons ought to know, that the solemn ordinance, which they treat with so much indifference, was, among the first believers, and during the better ages of the church, regarded not only as a principal instrument of comfort and edification, but as the prime object for which they assembled every first day of the week. It was also viewed as the chief means and expression of their union among themselves, and the most discriminating and decisive badge of distinction between the followers of Christ and the world that lay in wickedness. "At the beginning of the Gospel, such a thing was unknown as a believer who was not a member of a Christian Church and an observer of all the ordinances of Christ. There was then no intermediate space between the church and the world; no neutral territory which could be claimed by neither."* Were an apostolic believer to return to our earth, amazement would seize him, to find how times are changed—to hear the sounds and see the sights which would now

* Orme on the Lord's Supper.

meet his ears and eyes, among even our Congregational churches. In his days, men had not learnt to talk of the great ordinance of the Gospel, as not being "a saving ordinance," and to draw inferences corresponding with their presumption. It was then enough, that Christ commanded it. Men had not then begun to scrutinize the personal utility of an act of obedience. This refinement was reserved for later times. What a delusion is here! To whom belongs the honour or the shame—the merit or the guilt—of this mode of vindicating rebellion?

Neither is the ordinance of baptism, nor that of the supper, "saving;" nor is either instituted, in order to save. Salvation is solely of Christ; and man obtains it simply through faith in his blood. Christian ordinances are designed for Christian people, for persons who are already saved by grace. But does it, therefore, follow, that an ordinance established by Christ, has no important end to answer, and may safely be despised? Ready obedience to our life's end, to all the known will of God, is one of the principal tests of state, and one of those things "that accompany salvation." Salvation, moreover, is not merely a thing of state but of character; it is begun in the believer's heart on earth, although perfected only in Heaven. The spirit and the practice of universal obedience is salvation itself. But why is the supper the *only* institute, of which it is said, "it is not a saving ordinance?" For this reason—it is the only great ordinance which, undeniably, is wholly neglected. The parties who thus speak affect to consider themselves to be baptised, to be observers of the Sabbath, and of the ordinances of worship, and so far to be Christians. Church fellow-

ship, and that which it implies, they neglect, they confessedly neglect, and they talk, as above, respecting the Lord's supper, that they may hide from themselves their own transgressions. They say, "True, we do not observe this ordinance, but our omission is a very small matter; our loss is personal, and it is not material; it is not a saving ordinance." Thus the authority of Christ is wholly merged, and they speak of the sacrament of the supper, as quite a thing of profit and of option, which they are at liberty to treat as they please. But is not the Divine authority as much contemned by the neglect of one as of all the ordinances? Nay more, does there not attach to this ordinance a magnitude of importance peculiar to itself? To which of the ordinances may we humbly suppose the mind of Christ most fondly clings? Can it be doubted, for a moment, that it is to the supper? The supper stands at the head of all the ordinances of Christianity, as much as did the passover at the head of all the ordinances of Judaism. Nor is this all; the supper is, among Christian ordinances, precisely what the atonement is among Christian doctrines; it is the Alpha and the Omega; it gave existence to all the other ordinances, and it sustains them all. The supper of the Lord is the symbol of his atonement; and it derives all its honour, excellence, and power, from the atonement. It is exceedingly difficult to conceive, how any man can by faith have received the atonement, who lives on from year to year, in spite of conscience, of Scripture, and of pastoral remonstrance, in the neglect of the supper. This is the very last command with which love will trifle, and it is the very last act of homage with which the Saviour will dispense.

Here, then, we have the fearful sight of immense multitudes throughout the whole empire claiming to be considered as Christians, while they give no proof of repentance towards God, or faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—multitudes who make no conscience of obedience to the known laws and ordinances of his kingdom. The question then just comes to this:—Are the claims of such persons to be allowed? Alas! such claims have been allowed, and are allowed still, and sustained, on every hand, and, to a great extent, in the church below. But will there be no reversal in the church above? Let churches awake, and hear the master—"If ye love me, keep my commandments."—"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."—"He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings."—"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." However pastors and churches may choose to conspire against the Lord; and however governments may go on to enact men Christians by legislation, it will end in the above test at last. Who among us may abide the day of his coming, and the scrutiny that will follow?

We must now, fourthly, view the position of these myriads in relation to *church fellowship*. It is clear, from the Scriptures of truth, that the conversion of sinners was always accompanied by separation from the world. Overpowered by the love of Christ, and the spirit of loyalty to his cause, they hastened to escape from the company of his enemies, and took up their station in his visible kingdom. Irresistibly attracted also by love to each other, they could not live apart. From mutual love proceeded mutual fellowship. As church fellowship is the appointed,

so it is the only, way of making a public profession of the faith and hope of the Gospel. It is by this step, that a man, as a believer in Christ, openly declares such faith and hope. This measure speaks a language which both the church and the world distinctly understand. Mere attendance on Divine worship is not a profession of religion—it is an act common to men of very opposite characters. Nothing as to morals or piety can be safely inferred from it. The masses themselves, of whom we speak, do not generally deem it a profession; they view it as a comely and a meritorious act, but not as amounting to a profession; hence they often plead as a mitigation of sin, if not as an apology for it, the fact—that they "do not profess." "We," say they, "make no profession; such things would, indeed, be wrong if we did; but we make no profession." It is, therefore, time for all concerned to inquire into the immediate design of church fellowship. One object of it is, to secure the personal edification and welfare of the members. The arrangement of Divine love and wisdom is, that the church shall be built up, preserved, and enlarged, according to a fixed and settled plan. It is, therefore, the purpose and pleasure of Christ, that every soul of his people should be enrolled in his visible kingdom, where it is not rendered impracticable by circumstances. The general rule is this: the Holy Spirit operates constitutionally, according to a settled system of laws; he exercises his gracious influences on the souls of his people, chiefly in their associated and organized capacity. The ordinances of his own appointment are the fixed channels of his grace. Ever since God had a church upon the earth, this

has been his method of imparting the rich communications of his sovereign favour, and hence that remarkable Scripture:—"They that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God." Such is the doctrine, and the fact is in accordance with it. If we examine the records of piety, it will be seen, that the long and shining roll presents few names of persons, if even one, who declined to confess Christ before men, and who lived and died unconnected with the fellowship of a church. He "honours those who honour him, and such as despise him are lightly esteemed."

Another object of church fellowship is, the carrying on of Christ's government among his people, and the extending of his conquests on the earth. A leading design of associating believers is, that they may support, preserve, and diffuse the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. To this work, individuals are utterly inadequate; and it can only be achieved by associated bodies of believers. It is through the church, that the Saviour bestows his blessings upon a lost world. Their property, prayers, and efforts, are the appointed means of fulfilling his prophecies relating to the conversion of the human race. Thus, likewise, he accomplishes his promises to his people. A large proportion of the promises made *to* believers are such as, without miracle, can only be performed *by* believers. The promises made to one class, therefore, rightly understood, are precepts to another class. In this way the Lord performs his word to the widow and the orphan, the sick and the distressed. These are some of the ends for which church fellowship is established—ends which can never be realized, with uniform

certainty and efficiency, by any other means. It is the Master's will, that all his servants and saints should be united by mutual dependence, and endeared to each other by a sense of mutual obligation, and strive together, as one man, for the furtherance of his kingdom.

The ultimate end of church fellowship is, the promotion of the Divine glory. This great object is accomplished by that voluntary act, which brings believers together into one body. The withdrawment of believers from the world, their union with each other, their observance of his ordinances, and obedience to his laws, are practical and visible demonstrations of subjection to the authority of Christ; just as the reverse of all this, on the part of the unbelievers, who constitute our congregations, is a practical and visible demonstration of rebellion, and contempt for that authority. This view presents the conduct of these congregations in a very awful light. Assume that they are unbelievers to a man, then the conclusion is as certain as it is terrible;—they are all in the broad way that leadeth to destruction! Or, grant that the bulk of such congregations are believers; still their guilt is unspeakably great, and their conduct fraught with the most imminent peril. Were all the people of God to act as they are acting, the churches of Christ, throughout all the earth, would be dissolved at once—the visible kingdom of Christ would disappear from the world—and all the ends and objects hitherto accomplished and sustained by its organized existence would instantly cease to be answered, or be utterly defeated. That the bulk are believers, cannot, however, be granted; for the mighty mass are, incontrovertibly, dead in sin, and must be treated as unbelievers, enemies to

God, and despisers of the Gospel of his Son. We are, nevertheless, desirous to hope the day may declare, that there is a considerable number of exceptions to be made of individuals, in whom is "the root of the matter," but who, from various causes, almost all of a Popish origin, are living in a state of separation from the flock of Christ, equally to the injury of their own souls and of his kingdom.

Men and brethren! ye whose hearts the Lord hath touched, why come ye not out from the midst of a wicked world? How long will ye go on to call Jesus, Lord, and yet refuse to do the things that he commands you? "Ye rebel and vex his Holy Spirit!" So did the ancient church; "therefore, he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." Can you read these words without trembling? Brethren, look within, and see if they be not realized in you already! Of spiritual prosperity you know little; you have not even now a calm and settled peace; it is often doubtful to yourselves, whether there be within you the first and infant breathings of the divine life! Ye scarcely know your own selves, "whether you be in the faith," or not! You do not enjoy religion, you rather only endure it; it is more an occasion of distress to you than a source of consolation. Brethren, beloved! how can it be otherwise? Your homage of attendance on public worship is worthless, because it is equivocal; you rank with the world; you remain among the enemies of God; and, to appearance, you proclaim your preference for their unsanctified society to that of the faithful! Under these circumstances, you have no ground to expect a blessing to rest upon your souls. Oh! come forth, and be ye separate; be persuaded to decision upon this matter,

and ye shall know the faithfulness of our God. Associated with his people, ye shall grow in knowledge, and in spiritual understanding; your faith will be confirmed; your love will be inflamed; your joy in the Lord will be increased; your affections will be improved in devotion and holiness; and, soul, body, and spirit, ye shall be "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

The subject rises into awful solemnity, from the fact, that the churches are chief parties to the delusion of these great bodies of immortal beings, who compose their congregations; and hence they are laid under a dread responsibility, in respect to them. The churches grant them privileges, and treat them in a manner which must inevitably generate a notion, that there is a great and essential difference between them and the world around, who stand connected with no Christian society; and, that they are, at least almost, if not altogether, Christians. They are allowed to be largely mixed up with the churches. The churches are not simply consenting—they are inviting parties. They have laid the snare;—the congregations have only fallen into it:—they marry them;—they baptize their children;—in sickness and in sorrow they visit their families, as they do those of their own members;—after death, they give them what is designated Christian burial. In some cases, they even share with them the highest of all privileges, by granting them an equal voice in the election of ministers, and in regulating the internal affairs of their churches; they allow, and even request, the wealthier of them, to go hand in hand in the erection of chapels;—they permit or solicit them to become, and act as, trustees of such chapels;—they press them for their

pecuniary contributions, and strive to enlist their personal services throughout the whole range of Christian operations. One or other, or all of these things, many churches, denominated Congregational, however erroneously, do, suffer, or permit;—and few, if any, of such churches stand fully acquitted of some of them. This conduct, however, involves a principle of the highest possible moment. It is right, or it is wrong: if wrong, let it be reformed; if right, let it be followed out. *The churches must either grant less, or demand more.* The question must soon come on:—"How far does the existing order of things comport with Apostolic practice and primitive usage?" That question opens a wide field of discussion, and involves momentous subjects of inquiry. Before we can effect decision, we must make more distinction "between the holy and prophane—the unclean and the clean."

The conclusion of the whole is this:—Here we have three-fourths, or, according to Dr. Redford, four-fifths,* of all our Congregational assemblies occupying the dreadful position which has been already described and set forth. Surely this great portion of our friends and fellow-creatures, on every ground, after the children of the members, constitute the next department of the Congregational vineyard. It becomes the duty of all pastors and churches, to seek after the salvation of these perishing multitudes. They ought to experience no rest in their bosom, until every soul in every congregation be turned to God, and until Christ be formed in their hearts the hope of glory. Here is a mass of humanity voluntarily congregated around them, and offering itself to be acted upon. It is spiritually

* See p. 229.

dead;—shall it be considered and treated as if alive? It is in the utmost peril;—shall we affect to view it as in safety? It is slumbering in fatal security;—shall its sleep be permitted to remain unbroken? Who will not call upon the sleepers to awake, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give them light? Their real peril arises from their apparent security. As the darkest spot in the room is just under the table, which sustains the lamp-stand—so the congregation attached to a Christian church, as to its real condition, is often the most blinded portion of the immediately surrounding population, and, by the church itself, the portion least commiserated. The congregation, like an object too near to be distinctly seen, occupies a position which tends to conceal its danger, both from itself and from the church. It keeps Sabbaths—rents pews—sings hymns—hears sermons—does the work—bears the burdens—and receives the privileges already specified;—all which things are a powerful opiate to the souls both of the church and of the congregation.

The line which discriminates between the church and the world is, now-a-days, almost obliterated. Every thing connected with the interior of chapels, with the order of services and worship, is so arranged as almost completely to merge and conceal all distinction between the church and the congregation—that is, between believers and the world. Scarcely a matter occurs, in the space of a year, with the slender and almost unseen exception of the observance of the Lord's supper—an exception recurring only twelve times a year, in most churches—to remind the congregation, that they are "without." In fact, as things now stand, it is certain to a demonstration, that even the

Congregational system, notwithstanding the unquestionably scriptural and Apostolic character of its great outline, and its general excellence, co-operates not a little with the other more corrupt and less scriptural systems of the empire, to deceive the souls of men, and to unite the church with the world. There is a crying necessity, every where, for a second Reformation. We must, however, repeat and insist, that, for the lamentable state of things which now prevails, the churches are to blame, more than the congregations. The churches have placed them in this their perilous condition; and the churches are bound to hasten to the rescue. They may not satisfy themselves with coolly saying—"Our pastors preach the Gospel to them, and what more can be done?" Facts shew, that, with respect to most of them, this is utterly insufficient, and that other and more adapted means than pulpit ministrations must be employed to convey the Gospel to their understandings, and to impress it upon their hearts.

The churches then, as already stated, must commence their movements in behalf of the world, first at their own firesides, among their own children—and next, in their organized strength, they must start at the front of their own communion-tables, and work their way outward, on every side, among their own congregations, endeavouring, with all skill and the utmost earnestness, to teach every man, to warn every man, to make every man a friend, and to enlist the whole, small and great, men, women, and children, under the banners of the cross, that they may go forth with them, and for them, as fellow-soldiers, against the vicinity, the villages, the nation, and the whole

world. This, then, is the proper sphere of the second class of our lay agents.

Having previously asserted the insufficiency of mere preaching, to meet the case of multitudes in the congregation, as distinguished from the church, it is necessary now to inquire into the character of an appropriate supplemental means for their more efficient Christian culture. The examination of the end will infallibly conduct us to the proper instrument; and such an examination, combined with considerable experience, has led to the conclusion, that a suitable supplementary apparatus will be found in the following plan :—

1. The minister shall thoroughly agitate the question in a course of sermons, setting forth the necessity of further means of instruction, with a copious exposition of the grounds of that necessity. Let him support his views by a reference to the universal practice of the primitive church—to the method which has been found indispensably necessary in academic education—to the Moravian principle and practice—and to the examples which now begin to present themselves in various parts of the world. Let him warmly expatiate on its personal advantages to the individuals, whose humility may induce their submission to it. Let him hold up to the congregation a picture of the beauty of a whole assembly thus brought under a system of Christian tuition. Let him dwell in glowing colours on the relation which it bears to individual salvation, to Christian fellowship, to improved capacity for usefulness in the church, and in the world, and to the general welfare.

2. When it may be presumed, that all are in a good degree prepared to look with favour upon the measure, let the pastor announce from the pulpit, that, as a preliminary step, at given times, the names and addresses of the *whole congregation*, not already incorporated in the theological classes specified under the second department, will be received and registered by the helpers.

3. Heads or occupants of houses, who have a well-aired, comfortable room, capable of containing from twelve to twenty individuals, and who will feel it a privilege and an honour, to have it occupied once a week for Christ, shall next, from the pulpit, be requested to transmit their names and addresses to the pastor.

4. There shall then be an allocation among the rooms, of the individuals, whose signatures have been obtained, according to their respective residences, and who shall be constituted into companies or classes, comprising each from twelve to twenty—and not more, which would tend to defeat the object.*

5. The pastor having selected from the church, a body of the most intelligent, judicious, and devout persons he can find—who shall henceforth be denominated congregational helpers, in contra-distinction from the district helpers—one of these shall be appointed to each room, and a day fixed for the first meeting. At that time, the pastor shall

* If the members of the entire church were to be enrolled and allocated, at the same time, into the same classes, three members in a class of twelve, or five members in a class of twenty, it would be a source of great comfort and assistance to the helper. It would be a means of immense advantage to the members themselves; and it would be of signal service to the other attendants of the class. Thus it is among the Wesleyan Methodists, whose classes—the main pillar of their strength—are composed of believers, and others desirous to "flee from the wrath to come."

repair to the spot, and constitute the class. He shall introduce the helper and the persons composing the class to each other, and lay down the method by which it is to be conducted. He shall also deliver a book, containing the names of the class, and shall request the helper to mark attendance weekly, and report to him upon that, and the general state of the class, once in every three months. It is desirable that such helpers should all be heads of houses, and considerably advanced in years.

6. The great object of the class must determine the mode of its management. That object is not, principally, devotion—it is even presumed that the bulk are unawakened persons. The great end, then, of assembling them, is, to impart instruction in order to their conversion. It is not, therefore, required or permitted, that much time be spent in devotional exercises. Singing may be dispensed with, especially where the helper does not possess the capacity of leading the tune. It suffices for the helper to offer up a short, appropriate prayer for spiritual aid, at the commencement, and for the blessing of God at the close of each successive meeting.

7. The Sabbath afternoon, especially where there is no service in the chapel, is the best period for holding these meetings. At that time, servant-maids, apprentices, journeymen, and workmen of all kinds, are at leisure, and in a state of mental repose to listen to instruction. This season is, on other grounds, both strong and weighty, the proper period for their convention.

8. Pastors, who do not preach in the afternoon, shall, according as health and strength may permit, visit these meetings in order, once a quarter, and converse indivi-

dually with the members of the class, on the state of their hearts and views, and the ground of their hope.*

9. The helpers of the districts shall be specially appointed as superintending visiters of these classes—each set of helpers limiting their labour of love to such classes as are held within their own district. They shall visit in rotation; and the congregational helper shall always be apprized of the intended visit. The visiting helper shall always remain the whole time with the classes, otherwise he will but distract the business, and the end of his visit will be defeated; he shall engage a part of that time, after the business of instruction is terminated, in suitable conversation, endeavouring to encourage the class, and to hold up the hands of the helper, and he shall then conclude the meeting with prayer. These visits shall be arranged according to a plan, that they may be paid at proper distances, and with due regularity; this shall constitute a part of the monthly business of the district.

10. A box of appropriate tracts and books shall be deposited in the class-room, and placed under the care of the helper, not to give but to lend, to the individuals who compose his class. This small library shall comprehend Baxter's Call, Alleine's Alarm, Guthrie's Great Interest, Bunyan's Grace Abounding, and Pilgrim, Doddridge's Rise and Progress, James' Anxious Inquirer, and a considerable number of similar works, with others adapted to a more advanced stage of experience; and a few suitable pieces of religious biography, including Scott's Force of Truth, Brainerd's Life, the Memoirs of Martin,

* This is done universally among the Methodist classes, and is indispensable to the success of the system here delineated.

Edwards, and others. These books the helper shall give out, according to the circumstances of his class, and, when they are returned, endeavour to ascertain whether the parties have read, understood, and profited by them.

11. In these classes, each sex shall, of course, meet apart; and, in the arrangement, due regard shall be had to standing in society, both as to the helper and the individuals composing the class. For the female classes, it would be desirable to train a body of superior female helpers; till that can be done, we may use the services of grave married men.

12. In addition to these general classes—into which all practicable and proper methods shall be earnestly employed, to press *every seatholder and hearer in the congregation*—there shall be at least *two special classes*, one for each sex, to meet also on the Sabbath afternoon, and to be composed of persons drafted from the general classes, who are deemed to be in an awakened and decidedly hopeful state. These shall be designated the Pastor's Classes, and be under his more immediate charge, while each of them shall also, nevertheless, have its own proper helper. Let the pastor's wife, if duly qualified, and it be otherwise convenient, meet the female class, and a person of the first ability that can be procured, meet the other; and let the pastor himself be present, at least a part of the time, as often as possible. These two classes shall be understood to constitute the door of the fellowship. To them, therefore, all applicants for membership—of whose immediate fitness there is the least doubt—shall be uniformly transmitted, that they

may enjoy its benefits, and be further tested as to their real spiritual condition.

Such is our general plan, which amply possesses the first of all requisites—it is every way and easily practicable : but, if executed in a proper manner, who shall adequately declare its benefits? In whatever light it be viewed, it is surrounded with important advantages. It will turn to the best account the best part of the best day of the week, which, at present, is greatly misspent, if not, in some degree, even profaned, by the principal part of our congregations, where there is no afternoon worship. It will furnish employment, and an interesting object of pursuit, to multitudes, who are now idle, and the ready prey of all temptations. It will tend most powerfully to fix individuals to one chapel, and to put an end to wandering and unsettled habits, which are always hurtful; and to establish and cement the whole congregation. It will introduce—what is now so little felt, and so greatly needed—an element of social sympathy and friendship throughout the whole assembly. The district and congregational helpers will be so many centres of good-will, and ripening, reciprocal regard. The weekly meetings will prove the source of a useful intimacy among all concerned, which will constitute a happy relief from that sad and dreary loneliness which multitudes now feel, especially in our larger congregations, in great towns. We may confidently expect, that the social influence of this arrangement will prove of the greatest possible benefit even to multitudes of young people born in the vicinity; and that it will be a source of still higher advantage to the friendless stranger, who

may come to settle in our great towns and cities. The fruits of this single operation will be found more precious than rubies, and will appear in the strength and prosperity of the churches. All this, however, is to be viewed as only a means to a still higher end. By this process, attention will be arrested, and the heart and the conscience will be seized as if by the naked hand; and thus may the living word of Jesus Christ be richly poured into the soul. Here will persons be thoroughly taught first principles, and led on to a state, in which they will be able to profit from pulpit instruction, and to appreciate a ministry of the highest order.

The immense importance of this personal instruction has not escaped the all-grasping mind and eager spirit of the diocesan of Chester, who boldly declares that—"Without this, little permanent effect will be produced by any ministry; and with it, a minister who is comparatively feeble in the pulpit, will be more useful than the most eloquent who confines himself to the pulpit alone. It would be a great mistake, to believe that even those among our people, who are commonly seen in their places at church, must have competent Christian knowledge. —Experience tells us what lamentable ignorance may exist, together with tolerable regularity of attendance. This is no wonder; the wonder would be if it were otherwise; the wonder is, that the contrary is supposed, and taken for granted. For whoever considers the matter, and judges of religion as he would judge of any other subject about which mankind are conversant, cannot but perceive that uninformed minds are incapable of deriving material advantage from what the pulpit affords—that is,

from a *lecture*. Attendance at church, too, is commonly and often necessarily broken and interrupted; so that no opportunity is given for receiving any systematic course of instruction." * His lordship, referring to the practice of the first ages, goes on to say—"We learn from history, that adult candidates for baptism were not admitted to that rite, or allowed to bear the honourable title of Christians, till, by a long and regular process of education as catechumens, their ignorance had been enlightened, and they were no longer 'children in understanding.'" †

The same sagacious person, in his second charge, pursues the subject with reiterated urgency. Arguing the importance of this direct intercourse, in the business of instruction, he proceeds to insist, that—"At any age, nothing is effected in religion, till the mind is roused. In personal inquiry and discussion this takes place: the intellect is engaged; the powers of the understanding are exercised; and, in the course of such active occupation, the heart becomes insensibly interested, and opened to the influence of the Spirit. Eminent ministers have recorded, that, of all their busy hours, that time has brought them the most abundant return which they have devoted to catechetical exercises—to conversational instruction, and daily experience ends in the same result. That minister will have most success to be thankful for, who, by any of the various plans which have been devised, and which he may find locally available, is able to engage, not the young alone, but *all the different ages of his flock in this most reasonable service—the personal discussion of matters of everlasting moment.*" ‡

* Primary Charge, p. 20. † Ibid, 22. ‡ Second Charge, p. 16.

The imperative necessity of this species of instruction begins to be strongly felt by thinking men, in divers places throughout the Christian world. The American churches in this, as in most other matters of education, are occupying a foremost place. Upon such a subject, the English reader will readily give an attentive hearing to the Rev. John Todd, of Philadelphia. This gentleman would convert the entire church and congregation into one Sunday-school. He contends, that "every member should have something to do with it, either as a teacher or a scholar." His principle, however, is a deviation from that laid down by us, and so far we consider, that he has committed an oversight; his plan also labours under several serious imperfections, especially as applied to England. The views of Mr. Todd are, nevertheless, so appropriate to our subject, that we shall give them entire.

Adverting to the duty of parents to aid the operations of the school, by infusing a reading habit into the minds of their children, he thus proceeds—"If the church were to do her duty, almost all of the congregation would be connected with the Sabbath-school, in some relation or other. In some of our congregations this is already the case. I could mention several village congregations in New England, in which the Sabbath-school numbers between five and six hundred, or nearly all of the congregation. These are the most interesting schools I have ever seen. I have seen a class of ladies—probably all over fifty years of age—who sat down to the recitation of the lesson, with as much interest as any class of children could. I do not intend to say, that all, without excep-

tion, can do so. Mothers with young children cannot; and fathers, sometimes, cannot be connected with the Sabbath-school. But these cases are exceptions to the rule, when I say, that the church and congregation can profitably belong to the school. How often do we hear people lamenting, that they could not have enjoyed the benefits of the Sabbath-school, when they were children! Do they forget, that they can *now* go, and enjoy all those benefits? Do they forget, that the Sabbath-school would actually do them more good now, than when they were children? But it is hard to begin now; they cannot bring themselves up to the point of doing it. I ask, If it be so hard for you who profess to love the Bible—who love religion—who feel your need of light and instruction—if it be so hard for *you* to study the Bible, what must your children suffer in doing it? They do not profess to love the Bible, they do not feel the need of its light and instructions — and yet you feel that it is their duty to go to the Sabbath-school? May I ask a plain question? Is it not *pride* which prevents you from belonging to the Sabbath-school? I ask it, because I have known many who wished the privilege of being at the teacher's meeting, with a view of hearing the lesson explained, who could not be induced to belong to the school itself.

"It is impossible for any mind, not absolutely unbalanced by disease, not to be benefitted by studying and talking about the Word of God. I could wish to see *all our congregations* belonging to the Sabbath-school. Good rooms should be provided, and the adult classes, by *all means*, should be separated from the children. It is from negligence of this simple rule, that so many attempts to induce the whole congregation to unite in the

Sabbath-school have failed. It is vain, to try to have all in the same room; but different rooms can be provided: the adult classes can each select their own teacher, and the object so desirable can be accomplished. In the Tabernacle, in New York, they have a room for each adult class separate from the rest—an admirable plan. But you can never expect a congregation to come into the system, if the *church* stands aloof. They cannot be induced to give up their conversations and their resting seasons, if the people of God refuse to do it." *

This plan of the transatlantic churches is pervaded by defects of the most fatal character. The idea of mixing up old and young together, "infants of days," and men of gray hairs, in one common Sunday-school, is an absurdity all but matchless. In "several village congregations," however, it has succeeded; but in all other cases it has failed. The great point to be deduced from these facts is this:—So strong in America has been the pastoral conviction of the necessity of *direct personal instruction*, as to lead to a very extended effort to introduce it; and it was only in consequence of lending a deaf ear to the voice of experience, and the dictates of common sense, "that so many attempts failed."

Mr. Todd's own plan, or rather hints towards a plan, is also very defective; and any expectation of utility from such a method will prove but a mockery of hope. He violates, in various points, the governing principle, urged in a previous section, when he proposes, that each class of the adults of the congregation shall "select its own teacher." It were not more preposterous to put a class of little stranger-children to select their own teacher, than to

* Todd's Sunday School Teacher, an excellent book, pp. 310—312.

call upon a dozen or a score of seatholders—who, probably, have no knowledge of each other, and no personal acquaintance with a single member in the whole church—to make choice of a wise, prudent, and experienced person, to act as their leader and instructor. A company, too, so constituted, would form a little separate fraternity, wholly apart from the pastor and from the church, and be involved in all the disadvantages consequent upon such a position. Without detailing those disadvantages, which may be perceived by a comparison of this with the plan already set forth, we must be allowed to insist, that, unless there be provision made for the preparation, the appointment, the superintendence, and continued improvement of both helpers and catechists—for the regular visitation of the classes—and for the guidance of the penitents onwards to other classes, as the *entrance of the church*—unless the piety, zeal, and energy of the whole church be embarked in the work, and the pastor be the soul and life of all—the scheme will inevitably prove abortive. Then as to rooms—Mr. Todd's views are open to objection. A congregation, of considerable magnitude, would require from twenty to thirty rooms, each of capacity sufficient to receive about twenty persons. The New York Tabernacle has, it seems, a set of such rooms attached to it, which Mr. Todd thinks "an admirable plan." In England, we are confident, no such scheme could be generally carried. There is an entire want of space attached to our chapels, in the great proportion of towns and cities, to admit of such erections, and, were it otherwise, the expense of building in this country would, in most cases, be an insuperable obstacle. But even if

this difficulty were removed, we consider Mr. Todd's method of collecting all the congregation together still objectionable. We deem it, on various grounds, far better to scatter these meetings about in all directions, than to concentrate them on one spot. This will not only save the labour of travel, and, in proportion as it does so, secure a more full and uniform attendance at all seasons; but likewise promote friendly intercourse, with all its happy consequences, over the neighbourhood; nor will this be its only advantage, for these meetings will, in due season, become lamps of light in the centre of their several dark circumferences, and, in the hands of a skilful pastor, work out admirable results.

SECTION V.

OF THE POPULATION IN THE VICINAGE OF CHAPELS IN TOWNS AND CITIES, AS THE FOURTH DEPARTMENT.

It is presumed, that the labours of the district stations will chiefly affect the population resident beyond the immediate vicinity of the chapel; and that, in large towns and cities, when the utmost has been done in this way, much will remain to be accomplished by other means. We must, therefore, now inquire by what methods the church can most successfully assail the whole body of its surrounding families. In the arrangement of plans for this object, it is indispensable to adhere to the following general principles:—

1. *Beware of attempting the occupation of too much territory.*—The commission of this error has been all but universal; and it serves sufficiently to account for the limited success which has attended much well-intentioned, but ill-directed labour. As a general rule, we would say to churches and pastors, in the language of an eminent practical clergyman already quoted—"Select a small district for the field of your operations, and cultivate it with assiduity and affection, till you see a blessing on your labours. Some defeat their benevolent exertions by undertaking too large a locality. A better crop will be raised from a handful of corn sown on a well-cultivated spot, than from a bushel thrown at random on an undressed acre; and in your attempts to evangelize your neighbourhood, you will secure far more grand and cheering results by confining your care to a few individuals and families, than by frittering away your energies on a vast and unmanageable multitude.—Let the converts subdivide and fix on small but adjoining localities, and pursue their benevolent efforts among its occupants till they gain more and more to the obedience of faith. By this subdivision of labour and multiplication of labourers, there is reason to expect, that the sacred cause will advance, till the workmen of one district meet the generous deeds of those of another, till our country be covered with the blessed fruits of their toil, every family leavened with the principles of piety, and the whole world ultimately converted into the kingdom of Christ."* In a word, let your motto be—"Divide and conquer." This

* Hamilton's Life and Remains, vol. ii. pp. 75, 76.

is humbling to pride, and felt to be a check upon ambition. Men are naturally averse to listen to the voice of the moralist, who teaches, that "extended empire, like expanded gold, exchanges solid strength for feeble splendour."* Whether in the pursuits of trade, of science, or of philanthropy, to grasp at every thing, is to secure —nothing.

2. *Beware of a frequent change of labourers.*—This rule rests upon a principle deeply seated in human nature, and it is of very general application. It has received a curious exemplification from what is termed the "Supply System," which, in every place, has proved an ultimate failure. All that is gained in novelty, is lost in strangeness. Novelty has for a time gathered crowds around successive preachers, but, in due season, the blossom has gone up as the dust; the Babel multitude have been scattered to the winds of heaven; or, if retained by a succession of gifted men, they have been but a rope of sand, without union, order, or discipline—a religious mob, rather than an organized church; and the confession has been ultimately extorted, that a settled pastorship alone can build up the spiritual temple of God. The thing is easily to be accounted for—"Where there are frequent changes, there can be no unity of plan in teaching, no exercise of personal influence, no attachment on the part of the people to the pastor, or of the pastor to the people. The temporary curate can have no knowledge of character, no power of discrimination—he must draw his bow at a venture, and fritter away his discourses in vague and

* Dr. Johnson.

unmeaning generalities, instead of aiming at the hearts of his hearers by individual application."* This principle applies to every species of religious instruction, and it ought to govern all the evangelical enterprises of the church of Christ.

3. *Beware of trusting to the operation of truth without personal contact and sympathy.*—These are as much a part of the instrumentality appointed for the salvation of men, as the truth itself. The exceptions, as in the case of insulated tracts and books, only serve to establish the rule. This is an error of wide-spread prevalence, which springs, in no small degree, from our nature and from our circumstances. Any one, taking a handful of tracts, can repair to a district, and proceed, after the fashion of a letter-carrier, to knock at every door, and distribute them, and periodically repeat the process, in the work of exchange. This is a safe and a bloodless enterprise, and its trophies are of a nature corresponding with its character. But it is not thus that souls in multitudes are to be won for Christ, and plucked as brands from the burning. The good effected by tracts is, no doubt, considerable; but they are to be viewed only as an auxiliary and very subordinate species of instrumentality. If visiters and tract distributors shall rest satisfied with this, the number of their converts, when their labours are ended, will soon be told. Such, however, with admirable exceptions, there is reason to fear, is the general course of practice among Christian instructors and district visiters in town and country, over all the land. But this process may be indefinitely repeated, and extended to a scale commensurate

* Bishop of Winchester's Primary Charge, p. 25.

with the dwellings of the whole people, and yet very little be effected towards the evangelizing of the country. There must be contact—intercourse—and sympathy.

Our object, with respect to the vicinage, must determine the character of our plans; and that object is so simple and so definite as to exclude all misconception or mistake. It is the salvation of men—and all our means, whatever aspect they may bear by the way, should conduct us to this as the end. This object is to be prosecuted by the education of children—by the further instruction and improvement of young persons—by the promotion of temperance—by stimulating habits of provident frugality—by visiting the sick and afflicted—by religious tracts—by Christian converse—by reading and circulating the Scriptures—and by preaching the word.

It will require a large body of Christian agency, to put these means into full and extensive operation; but we must not wait for magnificent preparations, nor for the removal of all obstructions before we put in the sickle. "It must not hinder our attempting all we can, that it is impossible to effect all we desire;—if we wait till all difficulties are smoothed, we shall wait till this world passes away."* When once the plans, already mentioned in former sections, have begun to operate with full effect, competent agents will multiply; and the number of those will be annually increased, who will be fully able to "teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord.'"

Our plan for evangelizing the vicinage population of large towns comprises four parts:—tract distribution—

* Bishop of Chester's Primary Charge, p. 31.

domestic exposition—moveable meetings for conference, exhortation, and prayer—and district preaching. This fourfold instrumentality, if wisely and devoutly wielded, will be found equal to every purpose of Gospel diffusion.

First. *Tract distribution.*—The first point is one of the utmost importance—the character of the visiters. The visiters then must be a superior description of persons. It is their province to lead the way for one class of labourers, to provide materials for another, and to aid all. It shall be an especial part of their business, to canvass for the Sunday-schools attached to the chapel, and also for the theological classes. They must use every effort to bring all the children to the former, and all the young persons, of both sexes, to the latter—they must press the adults to attend the domestic meetings now to be specified, and the chapel services—they must visit the sick, comfort the mourner, and speak for Christ, as opportunity offers. This, which we may designate the collateral benefit of tract distribution, is, in itself considered, an object of paramount importance. The tract furnishes a decent pretext for going into every house; and its exchange supplies a ground of continued revisitation. The influence of a wise, prudent, and zealous visiter, is very great; and the amount of his varied usefulness may be incalculable. The strength of visiters will lie much in their character. Character is the growth of time and popular knowledge of the individual; it is, therefore, of the utmost moment that the visiters, when once thoroughly known and loved, should change their locality as seldom as possible. In a few years, they will grow up into

strong influence. A blessing to all, they will be blessed by all; and when their work is done, their very memory shall be blessed, and held in everlasting remembrance.

Second. *Domestic exposition.*—This is an exercise which will bring little earthly glory to the performer, but infinite benefit to the cause of Christ, and of human salvation. Its inglorious character is one of the most obvious proofs, that the thing is of God. All sects, all countries, all ages, attest its utility. "Excellent results, far beyond expectation, have been found to proceed from a system of this kind, from the simple reading and exposition of Scripture to such a party as can be conveniently assembled in the houses of the poor.—Wherever these lectures have been introduced, the congregations increase—the sacramental attendance is larger—the signs of a Divine work become more visible." * The value of this simple means is not to be determined merely by opinion, but by positive experience. Tried by this test, its claims are great. It is one of the most effective methods of reviving, improving, and sustaining a congregation.

The importance, indeed, of this species of lay labour cannot be adequately expressed. It is the only method of reaching, effectively, an immense proportion of the British population. This is, at once, with giant might, to beard the lion in his den, and to assail the leprosy in its fountain. In no other way can the myriads of our great cities be instructed; and, till we begin to act with effect upon parents, we have but little, for a long time, to expect from our exertions among their children. The work, however, will require a host in point of number;

* Bishop of Chester's Second Charge, pp. 20, 21.

and yet the present number of professed believers in England, in so far as it is a question of numbers, would almost suffice for the instruction of the rest of the nation. But there is something else required for this mighty undertaking; there are qualifications necessary, which do not appertain to the bulk of believers; and yet these qualifications are such as it is rather a disgrace to want than an honour to possess. Piety, prudence, kindliness of manner, Scripture knowledge, and ready simplicity of expression—these suffice to constitute a person tolerably qualified for this honourable work. The weekly exercises of the members, at the district stations, will, in the space of two or three years, create an abundance of competent agency to commence the undertaking; and further improvement will follow, on constant practice. The subsequent outline, based, in the main, upon experience, will be found as effectual as it is simple, and of easy adoption.

1. As a first step, the minister shall assemble all those members, whom he considers qualified for expositors; when he shall consult with them about the contiguous locality to be chosen as the field of systematic labour, and converse freely over the nature and importance of the undertaking.

2. The minister, in the meanwhile, shall prepare and publish a simple and affectionate address to the surrounding inhabitants, generally, avowing the earnest desire of himself and his people, to promote their best interests —setting forth the leading objects which it is proposed to accomplish—and detailing, in the most forcible and engaging manner, the importance of meetings for domestic

exposition, together with the manifold advantages arising from them. A copy of this address shall then be presented to every householder of the locality marked out for occupation.

3. The minister, shortly after, shall proceed in person, accompanied by a friend, to visit every house, and to converse with its inmates on the subject of the address previously transmitted. He shall also endeavour to ascertain the general condition of the locality, with respect to religion, and the feelings of the inhabitants towards the proposed plan. He shall, at the same time, try to procure rooms for the purpose of the intended meetings, which will be obtained more readily than will be expected by such as have not made the experiment.

4. Having secured such rooms, let him fix upon one of the best, in point of size and situation, for the commencement of operations, next Sabbath afternoon. On the Saturday, one or two discreet persons shall call upon thirty or forty of the individuals residing in the immediate neighbourhood, to apprize them of the hour of meeting, and to invite their attendance.

5. On the following Sabbath afternoon, at the appointed time, the minister, accompanied by a few of the persons about to act as expositors, shall repair to the room. The pastor shall then commence, by a few free and friendly observations, after which he shall read a suitable portion of Scripture, and one of the expositors shall offer up prayer. Let the pastor next proceed with a homely, affectionate exposition of the passage which has been read, giving it a pointed and pathetic application to all present, introducing some pertinent anecdotes, and closing with a short prayer.

6. Before separating, the pastor shall express the satisfaction he feels, at having met such as have assembled, and intimate, that the exercise will be resumed next Lord's day, when the appointed expositor will commence his labours of love. He may likewise refer again to the publication already mentioned, respecting the importance of such meetings; and declare his hope, that all present will generally attend, and bring others with them. He may also request, for the convenience of the visiters, and for the encouragement of the expositor, that all present will give their names and addresses, in token of approbation. The policy of this measure is obvious; it has always been found to have an excellent effect; it forms a sort of tie; it is the pledge of an incipient friendship. He shall then put the list into the hands of the expositor, as an act which constitutes him the manager of the meeting.

7. There shall be, at least, two visiters attached to the expositor. They also shall have a list of those who have professed adherence, that they may visit them more frequently, cultivate a friendly feeling among them, and, as a means to this important end, supply them with tracts and books; that they may, as much as possible, prevent any of them from falling away, and, at the same time, press on the work of the Lord among them.

8. After a few Sabbaths, when confidence is somewhat established, the expositor may proceed to use greater freedom with the company, which will at once endear him and profit them. He may request some of the younger and better educated to read the chapter at the commencement. From this he may, at length, put a simple question to some of the more intelligent. He may then re-

quest all who can read, to bring their Bibles. He may thus, by little and little, advance upon them, until the meeting shall grow up into a well-conducted Bible class.

Thus we may consider one Domestic Meeting as fairly established. Let the process be repeated all around, so far as competent expositors can be supplied. The above mode of introducing the business will be found attended with many advantages, and to be an unspeakable improvement upon the ordinary methods of procedure. Thus managed, it will never wholly fail of success, even from the commencement; and, with Christian love and prudence in the visiters and expositor, under the divine blessing, it will prosper and advance from year to year. We have, throughout these sections, assumed, that we are speaking of a church comprising six hundred members; —now such a church, when thoroughly trained, ought surely to furnish, at least, fifty expositors. Such a body, aided by the proper complement of visiters, according to the model we have framed, allowing forty hearers to each, would superintend the spiritual improvement of no fewer than—two thousand persons! Nor is this all; they would not only teach truth, in a manner far more suitable and profitable to such persons than the first pulpit orator in the land; but they would also exercise a moral influence over each separate company of the whole mass, to which no pastor could ever attain by mere public labour. These honoured men will act as pioneers for the pulpit, and lay the foundations of the kingdom of God deep and strong in the human soul. They will prove boundless benefactors to families, and also blessings to the church. Of all methods of instruction, this is, for persons in the first

stage of inquiry, by far the best. Here the value and importance, the power and efficiency, of lay labour, will be demonstrated, on a scale so vast, as to overcome the most adverse and obstinate of its opposers. This mode of employing such agency, too, is not more salutary than safe. It is every way and wholly unobjectionable. It will be thrice blessed—to the teachers—to the persons taught—and to the churches.

But the employment will be as pleasant as it is profitable. Here we are not speculating; we are only echoing the voice of experience. One of a hundred examples may be given. A large and populous town has, for some years, been divided into districts by the clergy; each district consists of from nine to eighteen subdivisions, to all of which visiters are appointed. The objects of this association were the same as those alleged in the commencement of this section. After an experiment of several years, they report as follows:—"Experience has taught us, that it is impossible to go among forty families, and exercise there acts of judicious kindness, without ensuring their respect and affection. The poor are found to be grateful beyond expectation, and get so attached to the visiters as to resemble a large family. This is no exaggeration. It is a sweet reward for the trouble of the employment. The visiters thus obtain a great moral influence over the district. They are able to convey many useful impressions; their own character is more or less reflected upon those around them."* If such was the position of mere visiters, how much more commanding

* Bishop of Chester's Primary Charge, p. 38.

must be the influence of able expositors, and the attachment resulting from their substantial labours!

It is not meant, however, to be insinuated that there will not, occasionally, be difficulties, and cases of obdurate depravity, which may long defy the power of truth and love. Yet even such cases will often, in time, give way to that power. If we will exercise patience, many auxiliarieswill come, on the tide of Providence, to aid us in our difficulties. After a while, custom will come to our help; obvious usefulness will add to our credit; where competence despised our attentions, poverty will claim our friendship; sickness, striking its colours, will piteously implore our commiseration; and death, at times, by removing the most fierce and implacable of our foes, will leave us in possession of the field.

Third. *Movable Meetings for Conference, Exposition, and Prayer, on week evenings.*—This occupies a place between domestic exposition and regular district preaching, and is every way a most valuable method of diffusing the truth. It not only occupies a middle place, but sustains a mixed character. It makes provision for both instruction and devotion; it equally employs the pastor and the people. It is signally adapted to churches of limited numbers, and in small towns. It is one of the most ancient methods of Protestant usefulness; and it were difficult to say, whether it has been most efficient in conversion, or in edification. One of its principal features is, its itinerant character. It is a satellite to the chapel, around which it revolves, in continued progression. It may be described as follows:—The pastor fixes upon a large private dwelling-house, or school-room, if it can be procured; he an-

nounces from the pulpit, that, on a given evening, there will be a conference held in that place. On the arrival of the hour fixed, he opens the service by a hymn, after which, one of the brethren prays ; then the pastor reads a portion of Scripture, and after some general remarks upon the passage, he calls upon a member to give his views of it ; and after him, on another and another, according to circumstances ;—then the pastor sums all up, and sets right any thing which may require correction, closing with a hymn and prayer. This exercise is a great favourite with the multitude, and its admirable effects are attested by all who have been in circumstances to supply experience.

This plan is well exemplified by the Rev. Dr. Hyde—a name great in the history of true revivals—a minister of Massachusetts. In 1792, he was ordained over a small and feeble church, having only twenty-one male members. Under these circumstances, he could have done but little, in the way of district division; but he adopted a method which was perfectly within his reach. His own account is the following:—"Immediately on being stationed here, as a watchman, I instituted a weekly religious conference, to be held on each Wednesday, and in succession, at the various school-houses in the town. These were well attended in every district, and furnished me with favourable opportunities to instruct the people, and to present the truths of the Gospel, to the old and young, in the most plain and familiar manner. This weekly meeting has been sustained to the present time, without losing any of its interest ; and, when I have been at home, has carried me around the town as regularly as the weeks have returned." Forty years had this religious conference

continued — when the honoured and venerable writer penned these lines—"without losing any of its interest." These itinerant conferences were powerfully sustained by his church, which occasionally, "by a large committee selected from their body, visited every family in the town, and conversed with parents, and children, and domestics, on the concerns of their souls, and their prospects for eternity—closing their interviews with prayer." *

This sort of meeting, sometimes with, but generally without, ministerial presidence, has prevailed to a vast extent, and for ages, in many parts of Scotland, where its beneficial effects have been exceedingly great. They are now conducted with most success in the Highlands, where, in some cases, they prevail over the whole of a large district of country. In every parish, for instance, within the bounds of the Synod of Ross and Presbytery of Inverness, frequent meetings are held by pious persons, for reading the Scriptures, religious conference, and prayer. Meetings of this description are generally held on Saturday, sometimes during daylight. Meetings for similar exercises are held on Sabbath evenings, too, there being in those rural regions no evening sermon; "and in some cases, that every house in the hamlet may have equal advantage, and bear an equal proportion of the expense of the light and fire, the meeting circulates through the hamlet." † In the more southern districts, too, the same species of movable meeting is in operation. An itinerant of the Scottish Congregational Union recently reported as follows to that body:—"In one part of our preaching tour, Strathardle, I found in operation a system of ambulatory meetings for

* Letter to Sprague. † State of Religion in the Highlands, p. 27.

prayer and exhortation, conducted by private Christians. In this way, for several miles, on both sides of the river, the different villages have their visit of the meeting in rotation, when most of the inhabitants attend, besides others from a distance. The same plan is followed with the Sabbath Evening Schools, conducted by the same persons—two on the north, and one on the south side of the river. Both the prayer meetings through the week, and the Sabbath-schools, appear on the increase, in attendance, interest, and usefulnsss. Can we refrain from saying, in this case, 'Would God, that all the Lord's people were prophets,' in some such ways as these, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them, to qualify and dispose them for such services? Then might we expect to see many a moral desert rejoice, and blossom as the rose." *

Fourth. *District Preaching.*—Our last instrument for benefitting the vicinage population is, preaching at the several rooms of the district stations already specified, on the evening of the Lord's day. This will complete the circle of evangelical operations in the districts, each of which will then constitute a little system, bearing upon the surrounding population, in almost every possible manner and direction. It is conceived, that little more can either be required or supplied, in the way of practical plans. What is wanted further, is a host of heavenly-minded men—of men in whom is the Spirit of the Lord—to put all in motion, and to keep all in motion.

* Report of the Union.

SECTION VI.

OF THE VILLAGE POPULATION AS THE FIFTH DEPARTMENT.

Village preaching is a very important department of the subject of this treatise, and one which merits the closest investigation. The principles, however, of the proper method of management, in this department, are few and simple; and yet they are, almost every where, imperfectly understood or acted upon. Success in this field depends much less on refined devices than upon prudence, diligence, condescension, and hard labour. There are, however, certain principles, of such importance, that success is wholly incompatible with their violation. We have had occasion, either to make or to witness a good deal of experiment upon this matter, whereby those principles have been tested; and we are in possession of facts which serve to illustrate and support them. Such is our confidence in these principles, that we should unhesitatingly encounter any village in the empire, no matter what be the barbarism of its inhabitants, in the sure and certain hope of raising a congregation. Our views may be stated under two heads:—the best method of commencing the work—and the best method of carrying it on.

First. *The best method of commencing the work.*—Every thing, under God, in a great measure depends upon the

manner in which the undertaking is begun. It is here, that the first seeds of future difficulty have often been sown; and it is here, that many a cause has been lost, at the very outset. In a great proportion of our villages, the first attempts have been made in a manner but little fitted to conciliate favour, or to excite attention. To the praise of individuals, and to the shame of pastors and churches, it must be said, that, for the most part, the enterprise has been undertaken without the knowledge or privity, of either shepherd or flock. This was irregular and wrong, and the only defence of such impropriety is to be found in the conduct of churches and pastors. The illumination of the dark villages adjacent has been too much treated, by churches, as a matter in which they had no concern; and had individuals waited until the body moved, they would have waited long indeed. Had these individuals not set about it, however irregularly, the thing would not have been done at all. The consequence has been, that many have run unsent, and commenced an arduous work, without proper qualification, which has terminated in the evils set forth in a previous chapter. Others, less defective in this respect, have, for lack of experience, commenced in a way which has been most detrimental to success; and others, still, who have been wanting neither in wisdom nor prudence, have entered the vineyard, in the face of obstacles, which have proved all but insuperable, which have obstructed success for years, while, by proper measures, they might have been removed in a single day. To enumerate all the mistakes and errors which have been committed, were endless; and we shall, therefore, proceed at once to state the proper method of procedure.

1. Previously to commencing a cause in a village, let the pastor draw up an affectionate address, pointing out the benefits of education, the pleasures of knowledge, and the blessings of religion, and stating the desires, entertained by himself and his people, to promote the welfare of the village in question. In this address, it will be highly expedient for the pastor to give the intended mission somewhat of a temporal as well as of a spiritual aspect. A Sunday-school—Gospel preaching—a village library—a temperance society—and a friendly society—may, therefore, form proper topics of the address in question; and the happy effects of such means, as illustrated by facts, should receive a prominent notice.

2. The next step is, to find a school-room, or barn, or, failing these, a large dwelling-house, to be used as a school, or preaching place, as occasion may require. Another most essential step is, to find out some person of character, sense, and piety, resident in the village—if such there be—who will lend his aid to forward the object. In villages adjacent to large towns, it would be a most politic measure, were the church in a town, to procure some respectable tradesman or mechanic—a well-tried, well-disciplined member of the church, a man familiar with Sabbath-school business, and with the management of a district station, such as has been described—to remove with his family to the village, supposing that he could do so without material injury to his calling. The church ought, of course, to bear the expense of his removal; and it would be an act of further prudence, if not of justice, that in the village, so long as a considerable demand continued to be made upon his evening time, for the good of the

inhabitants, he should be made to live rent-free. Such removals, occurring casually, have, in a number of instances, led to the establishment of prosperous churches; and indeed, so great is the importance of such a resident representative of the Congregational body, and still more, of the Gospel of Christ, that, where such a man cannot be found in the village, he should, by all means, if possible, be transferred to it. This principle has been carried on, with great and uniform success, among the heathen; and the only wonder is, that so little use has been made of an instrument so powerful, at home.

3. When things are thus far advanced, some two or three discreet persons should visit the village, in a friendly manner, and give to every householder a copy of the address already mentioned. This will prepare the way, by exciting curiosity and inquiry; it will prevent misrepresentation, and at once place the mission on a proper basis. Let the address bear the name of the pastor and the designation of the church, and proceed as from them both; and let it breathe a spirit of fervent Christian charity. Let it also intimate the time when the enterprise is to commence.

4. Let the pastor, if possible, the week before the Sabbath intended for commencement, visit the village, and call upon a few of the more influential and respectable inhabitants, and converse with them upon the subject, endeavouring to conciliate their regard for the object, and to command their suffrages in its behalf. Let the pastor also be attended by two or three of the most active and experienced of his Sunday-school teachers, who may be induced to give up a day for the purpose; and let them

canvass the village, from one end to the other, for children to attend the school which is to be opened on the coming Sabbath, taking down the names of those whose parents give their consent. Thus much for the best method of commencing the work. We now advance to consider—

Second. *The best method of carrying on the work.*

1. The Sabbath having come, let the children assemble to form the school in the morning, and be reassembled for instruction in the afternoon; and let worship be commenced by the pastor, in person, in the evening. Let him, toward the close, point out the manifold advantages of private social exercises in religion; and let him labour to convince the hearers, that, for inquiring persons, this is, of all methods, the most contributory to improvement. Let him then state, that there is to be a private meeting of this sort, and for this object, immediately established in the village; and let him invite all who are disposed to avail themselves of its advantages to stay behind, that night, and give their names.

2. The person already mentioned, as being found on the spot or transferred thither, and who shall be superintendent of the school, and of all the concerns of the mission, shall also have the charge of this weekly meeting, which must be conducted in the same way as the domestic exposition already described. The attendants are to be led on by degrees, as they can bear it; and every means taken to gain their confidence and to win their affection, from an irresistible conviction that we are disinterestedly seeking their good. This mode of *collecting persons into private classes must be carried as far as it may be practicable*

to carry it. It must be held to be the express duty of every member of the class, to endeavour daily to prevail with neighbours, friends, relations, and companions, to attend. Let every effort be made to get the young men to meet in a class by themselves, and also, the young women.

3. Let a small, well-chosen library be placed under the care of the superintendent for the use, exclusively, of those who meet in the classes. Let this library comprise not only a full proportion of appropriate theological works, but a number of elementary and popular publications on science and education. Let it also contain books of travels, voyages, and history, and, above all, interesting religious biography.

4. Let there be a tract depository, also, in the house of the superintendent; and let every member of the classes be required to act as a distributor in his own immediate vicinity, exchanging the tracts once a month.

5. The school shall meet regularly, every Sabbath, morning and afternoon; and at the close of the afternoon meeting, there shall be an address to both parents and children, by the superintendent. In the evening, there shall be preaching to all who can be induced to attend; and, as soon as it can be accomplished, a prayer meeting shall be held, in a private house, after worship; and this meeting shall change, night after night, circulating all over the village, and the neighbours shall, every where, be invited to attend.

6. The classes shall meet weekly, each by itself, with its conductor; and they shall also hold one general public meeting, once a week, for reading the Scriptures, prayer,

and praise. This meeting shall be carried on by the superintendent and converts; and when it suits the pastor to attend, there shall be a sermon. At the close of service, on these occasions, the persons who compose the classes shall be requested to stay behind, when the pastor shall address them in a manner suitable to their situation, urging them to decision—to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and make a public profession of faith in the Gospel.

7. When an attendant of the classes becomes decided, in the judgment of the superintendent, he shall be introduced to the pastor, on the next occasion of his visiting; and, the result being satisfactory, he shall be admitted to the church in the ordinary way; and this shall be done, from time to time, as conversions occur. The company of village converts will thus become a branch of the mother church until they are able to stand alone, when they may receive a pastor, and manage their own affairs.

8. Such as have become decided, and been admitted to the church, when they amount to six or eight, shall be separated and formed into a class by themselves, to which all fresh converts shall be successively added. This class or company shall still continue to meet once a week, and when the increase of numbers requires it, they may be divided into two or more companies.

9. The attendants of the classes shall each regularly pay one penny a week. There shall also be a monthly collection from such as attend the preaching, and a new year's gift solicited and received from the classes, and all other hearers who freely consent to make contributions. These monies shall be put into the Savings' Bank, and shall constitute a fund for building a place of worship,

subject, nevertheless, to the deduction of the necessary expenses of carrying on the station.

10. There shall be a half-yearly tea meeting among all the members of the classes; and also an annual tea meeting for all those who attend worship in the village, the profits to go towards the support of the Sunday-school.

On this plan of procedure in villages, it may not be unimportant to offer several remarks. The general principle here proposed to be acted on, in introducing the Gospel to a village, is so consonant to the dictates of common sense, and so constantly resorted to by the world, in all great undertakings, where the concurrence of multitudes is necessary, that its importance here must be at once perceived. The idea of a godly man, well versed in religious matters, being thus located, is so simple, so natural, so analagous to the experimental procedure of mercantile companies, in matters of commerce—in its own nature so obviously desirable, and, to efficient operation, so indispensable—that the mere mention of it will carry the conviction to every judgment, that wherever it is practicable, it ought to be adopted. The preparatory visit for distributing the address must recommend itself as a most judicious measure, and one which is calculated to be eminently conducive to the intended object. The value of the address itself is too great to be easily apprehended;—it will pour light upon the entire object of the mission;—it will prevent slanderous reports, and tend to silence the gainsayer. The pastor's visit will authenticate the whole undertaking, while it will help to dignify and shield it from the scorn of not a few, who judge very much according to appearances; and the canvass for the

school will prove the best possible advertisement of the preaching, and make the most tender of all appeals to the parental heart. All this will stand in pleasing contrast with the unsystematic spirit which so generally presides over evangelical operations in the villages of Britain, and the miserably inefficient method of introducing the Gospel which ordinarily prevails—a method which excludes all prudential means, which almost necessarily creates obstacles, where it does not find them, and which, for the most part, has an end worthy of the beginning. By such a method as this, more may be done, in the establishment of a cause, so far as relates to mere instrumentality, in one year, than is now done frequently in a life-time.

The method set forth, for carrying on the work, comprises points of the very first practical importance; and all that is here urged is, more or less, based upon experience. Our proposal, to associate, into little companies, all that are awakened to inquire after God, and flee from the wrath to come, and who can be induced to submit to such an arrangement, is one deserving the most serious attention of all who have any thing to do with the diffusion of the Gospel in villages or rural districts. The neglect of this has marred our operations more than any thing else, or than all other things combined. The careful and uniform pursuit of an opposite course, on the contrary, has, more than any or than all other causes together, instrumentally contributed to the success of Wesleyanism. So thoroughly was Wesley convinced of its immense importance, that he came at length to the conclusion, that he would "never strike a blow, where he could not follow it up;" by which he meant the systematic repetition of

Gospel efforts, and, especially, the adoption of measures to induce persons to "meet in class." It were easy to point to places, which have been supplied with preaching, for a quarter of a century, by Congregational churches, and where all things remain nearly as they were, at the first day. At the given time, a number of people meet—a sermon is preached; and both preacher and people separate, again to meet and part in the same manner. The process resembles the operation of the door upon its hinges; progression there is none. But we plod on, speaking sweetly of "sovereign grace," and all the while neglecting the most obvious evangelical duty! Proceeding upon proper principles, we might, long since, have had good churches, where we have, at present, but the shadow of a congregation;—and a multitude of churches, now in a feeble and consumptive condition, dependent upon the precarious bounty of unions and associations, or upon the mendicant apparatus of anniversaries, might, long ago, have attained to the healthful vigour of robust manhood.

This mode of associating inquirers together is fraught with a great variety of advantages. The first and most obvious is that arising from direct personal instruction, stimulating attention, aiding inquiry, exactly adapting itself to each individual case, expanding thought and supplying knowledge. This process will do more to enlighten rustic simplicity in twelve months, than can be accomplished by the ablest sermons in seven years. Another great advantage is, the creation of a new order of society for the parties, who most need it, which constitutes, in a measure, a middle position between the fellowship of this world and the fellowship of the church of God. It is

a first remove of separation from the wicked, a situation suited to the state of their minds;—it lays the foundation of firmer and more stable friendships, and, at the same time, withdraws the awakening spirit to, at least, a small distance from the danger of temptation—the vortex of seduction—thus diminishing the difficulty of decision, and augmenting the probabilities of escape from destruction. This place of *transit* is much wanted, not simply in villages, but in all our *town and city Congregational churches.* There are many, whose condition is exactly suited to it, and whose salvation and fitness for fellowship it would exceedingly facilitate. Such classes would most powerfully unite the parties to each other, and, by consequence, tend to detach them from the world. These classes would also contribute to bind them to the place of worship, and to the means of grace.

The library and the tract depository will be found invaluable auxiliaries to village labour; and, when once established, can be kept up at a small expense. In the hands of a wise superintendent, these are instruments which may be wielded with great power.

The pecuniary part of the arrangement should be most rigidly adhered to, in all cases—except those of the most abject poverty. The advantages of this provision will prove very great, not in one point only, but in all that appertains to the station. The very intercourse which it will create, and the interest which it will establish in the hearts of the villagers, were there nothing else, would be highly beneficial, and greatly promote the common object.

The social meetings, also recommended, must not be lightly thought of. By these things men are kept toge-

ther; wisely conducted, they are highly profitable in all situations, but especially in villages, and in connection with infant institutions and collective operations. Even infidelity has begun to clothe itself with the power of the social principle; and "socialism" has at length become the watchword of a dangerous party in the land. It is time for Christians to exemplify their own true character. Christianity is, emphatically, socialism, founded in truth, and cemented by love. The socialism of ungodly men is a delusion, a mockery—"no bonds can bind base natures."*

* Brougham.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE SEVERAL CLASSES OF LAY AGENTS.

It is clear, that the thorough working of the five departments now specified will require a vast amount of corresponding agency. Such agency is, and it ever must be, an article of home production. Its growth and maintenance, therefore, are a matter of infinite moment to every pastor, and claim the most serious attention of every church. To this subject our attention must now be directed; and, as in the case of departments, so in that of agents, the first point that claims consideration is the governing principle.

SECTION I.

OF THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE RELATIVE TO AGENTS.

Ignorance or neglect of the governing principle, upon this subject, lies at the foundation of the present enfeebled posture of things relative to lay agency among the British

churches. The primitive power of that principle decayed, in proportion as the power of Antichrist arose, till at length, being entirely subdued, it lay dormant, and was all but extinct, during the long night of his dreadful dominion—a space of, at least, ten centuries—amid the darkness of Popish superstition. At the time of the Reformation it was resuscitated; but it remained in a sickly state for two hundred and fifty-years; and even now, it exists in a very frail condition. In fact, the principle, in every section of the Protestant church, has decayed since the Reformation. We have a striking example of this fact, in the Establishment of Scotland. Nowhere, since the days of the Apostles, was the resuscitation of the principle so complete as among the Reformers of the North. John Knox was at once an illustrious patron of the principle, and a steady promoter of the practice, of lay agency. There is, indeed, nothing in history, which so strikingly illustrates the intellectual illumination of that wonderful man, and his perfect emancipation from the darkness and thraldom of Popery, as his views in relation to this subject.

The views entertained of the principle, by the Reformers, in the days of Knox, may be most exactly ascertained from the famous *First Book of Discipline.* In that remarkable composition, there is a chapter—entitled, "*For Prophesying or Interpreting the Scriptures,*"*—which opens thus:—"To the end that the kirk of God may have a trial of men's knowledge, judgments, graces, and utterances; as also such that have somewhat profited in God's word, may, from time to time, grow in more full perfection to serve the kirk, as necessity shall require; it is

* See Knox's History of the Reformation, quarto edition, p. 525.

most expedient, that in every town, where schools and repair of learned men are, there be one certain day, every week, appointed to that exercise which St. Paul calls *prophesying*—the order whereof is expressed by him in these words:—'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the rest judge; but if any thing be revealed to him that sits by, let the former keep silence: ye may one by one all prophesy, that all may learn, and all may receive consolation:—and the spirit, that is, the judgments of the prophets, is subject to the prophets.' By which words of the apostle, it is evident, that in the kirk of. Corinth, when they did assemble for that purpose, some place of scripture was read, upon the which one first gave his judgment, to the instruction and consolation of the auditors; after whom did another either confirm what the former had said, or added what he had omitted, or did gently correct, or explain more properly, where the whole verity was not revealed to the former—and in case things were hid from the one and from the other, liberty was given for a third to speak his judgment to the edification of the kirk. Above which number of three, as appears, they passed not for avoiding of confusion. This exercise is a thing most necessary for the kirk of God this day in Scotland; for thereby, as is said, shall the church have judgment and knowledge of the graces, gifts, and utterances of every man within their body. The simple, and such as have somewhat profited, shall be encouraged daily to study, and proceed in knowledge; the kirk shall be edified. For this exercise must be patent* to such as choose to hear and learn; and *every man shall have liberty to utter*

* Open.

and declare his mind and knowledge, to the comfort and consolation of the kirk."

While it was thus provided, that, in every town, where there were proper persons to carry on the "exercise," there should be a weekly meeting for the same; it was also provided, that it should be mainly an affair of *exposition*, to the exclusion of all "curious, peregrine, and unprofitable questions." It was also provided that "the interpreter in this exercise, may not take to himself the liberty of a public preacher;"—that "he must bind himself to his text;"—that he must use "no invective;"—that, "in exhortations or admonitions, he must be short, that the time may be spent in opening the mind of the Holy Ghost in that place." Neither was it permitted to any interpreter, nor to any other person in the assembly, to "move any question," which he himself was not able to solve "without reasoning with another;" but every man was bound "to speak his own judgment, to the edification of the kirk."

This remarkable chapter sets vigorously forth one of the most important, and one of the most neglected principles, within the entire range of ecclesiastical polity—a principle, which, nevertheless, must be restored to its full, primitive operation among Congregational churches, before they can assume that station in the land which rightfully belongs to them. This is what we designate the governing principle relative to lay agency; and it is a point which we are most anxious to impress upon the members of the British churches It is embodied in the following provisions:—"Men, in whom is supposed to be any gift, which might edify the church, if they were well employed,

must be charged by the minister and elders to join themselves with the session,* and company of interpreters, to the end that the kirk may judge whether they be able to serve to God's glory, and to the profit of the kirk, in the vocation of ministers, or not; and if any be found disobedient, and not willing to communicate the gifts and special graces of God with their brethren, after sufficient admonition, discipline must proceed against them — FOR NO MAN MAY BE PERMITTED, AS BEST PLEASETH HIM, TO LIVE WITHIN THE KIRK OF GOD, BUT EVERY MAN MUST BE CONSTRAINED, BY FRATERNAL ADMONITION AND CORRECTION, TO BESTOW HIS LABOURS, WHEN OF THE KIRK HE IS REQUIRED, TO THE EDIFICATION OF OTHERS."

Such were the enlightened and Apostolic views of this great principle, which were held by the Scottish reformers. Nothing can be conceived more liberal and popular, or more adapted to promote the study of the Bible, to discover and cultivate talent, or to improve the spirit of devotion. Wherever this principle is devoutly cherished, and this practice is judiciously carried on, there will ultimately be no lack of competent lay agency. The church in which such an order of things prevails, will in some measure resemble the army of classic fame, of which its general affirmed, that, "every man was fit to command." Of all troops, such are the first to obey; for they best understand the reason and necessity of obedience. So will it be in the church of God; the most enlightened man will not only be the most truly useful,

* This term signifies the united body of the minister and elders of a parish, who constitute a court for the management of its ecclesiastical affairs.

but the most conscientiously peaceful member of a church —the most observant of the laws and the ordinances of the house of God: he, who is really fittest to teach, will ever be most forward to learn—and by this one test ought men's fitness to be uniformly tried. Let the plans already laid down be fully worked out, and a man will soon be found for every post, as well as a post for every man—nor is there the smallest reason to fear, that either knowledge or usefulness will lead them to insubordination to the laws of Christ, or to despise the Scripture authority of the pastor.

It can scarcely be viewed in the light of a digression, if we advert to the result of the experiment in Scotland. It is a fact so interesting in itself, and so strikingly pertinent to the subject before us, that it merits a place in this treatise. The institution of the "Weekly Exercise" continues up to the present hour, to a considerable extent, in some of the Highland regions—always the last to be affected by the spirit of change, which is there a thing of small power, seldom felt, and rarely seen. It continues there, the unrivalled object of popular favour, but slightly modified by the revolution of centuries. Its effects upon personal and social religion, among all classes, are beneficial to an extent scarcely credible. The history of this custom and exercise—of which what we have just been detailing was the undoubted original—also serves to illustrate one remarkable feature of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The enlightened and liberal author of the "History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles" has justly observed, that "There has not, as far as appears, any religious awakening, in the revival form, occurred in the

counties of Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Nairn, or Inverness; and yet, all who are well informed agree in the fact, that true religion prospers, in a regular and consistent progress, *more in the above counties than in any part of the Church of Scotland.** Ministers from these districts never fail to mention *'speaking to the question'* as one of their most successful means of grace."† This is, beyond controversy, the chief cause of the extraordinary superiority of the population of those extensive mountainous regions.

The exercise of "speaking to the question" is conducted in the following manner. In Ross-shire, for example, on the first Monday of every month, a meeting is held in the parish church for prayer and for "speaking to the question;" and also on sacramental and other occasions. After prayer and praise, the minister who presides inquires whether any person in the assembly has "a word of a question,"‡ respecting which he would like to hear the opinion of the brethren present. One or other generally rises and gives out a passage of Scripture, say, the following:—"Except a man be born again," &c. adding, that he is "anxious to hear the brethren's opinion on the nature of the new birth, and the marks of it;" and

* This is the natural, the proper, and the only healthful state of things—the state to which it ought, every where, to be our ambition to bring our churches. We are not unaware of the exceptions which exist in many parts of the above counties, and of the somewhat different reports which Mr Dewar of Avoch, Mr. Kennedy of Inverness, and other excellent ministers of the Scottish Congregational Union, who have itinerated amongst them, have given; but both representations are in the main correct, and quite reconcilable with each other.

† History of Revivals, p. 347.

‡ This is the Gaelic idiom.

so of any other point of theology; they read or recite the passage, and make a statement of their desire, which is a virtual question. The subject being thus set forth, and the question propounded, the presiding minister gives a brief exposition of the text, in order to lay it open to those who may be requested to speak. He then calls, by name, on some well-known and experienced Christian, to rise and "speak to the question." Often half a dozen persons, in succession, speak; and then the minister, presiding, recapitulates the substance of what has been brought forward by the various speakers, correcting what may require correction, and applying the whole. The person who propounded the question is generally called upon to conclude with prayer, and after a psalm is sung, the congregation retires.

The tongue of the Christian may be said to be fairly emancipated in those regions—still the residence of primitive simplicity. The principle, that all who can speak for the glory of God, and to the edification of his church, not only may, but *ought* to do so, is there completely established; and, without restraint, or fear of evil, universally acted upon. In our orderly, clerical, Episcopalian country, it is difficult for us to credit even authentic history, concerning the religious habits and exercises of those vast counties already mentioned. Their sacramental occasions are not of frequent occurrence; but when they do take place, they occupy the greatest part of a week with preaching, and "speaking to the question." At such seasons, a congregation of ten, twelve, or even fifteen thousand persons, will often assemble at a sacramental communion, in a parish comprising a population of not more than two or three

thousand souls. "On such occasions, catechists, elders, and private Christians, who are noted for their piety and talents, from parishes far and near, in Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness, often meet together. Assemblies for prayer and religious exercises are held every evening during the preaching days, in every part of the parish."* The Friday previous to the communion Sabbath is a grand occasion, when the most eminent Christians, from the surrounding country, "speak to the question," one might almost say, all day long. An able witness thus reports concerning those exercises :—"It is most refreshing and instructive to listen to the varied experience, the ready utterance, the clear illustrations, the correct modes of thinking, and the striking similes of many of these speakers, some of whom, though they may never have learned to read, prove themselves mighty in the Scriptures, and well acquainted with the human heart in all its windings. The 'speaking to the question' has many beneficial effects; among others, it is calculated to arrest the attention of the most careless individual in the congregation, and to convince him, that many are in earnest in their religion, and that he ought to be so likewise." †

The effect of all this upon the population of those regions, is altogether wonderful. Two well-established facts are specially worthy of consideration. The first respects the preservation of piety through a series of years, independently of all the disadvantages arising from the incumbency of a worldly parochial minister, whom the law of patronage sometimes enables to occupy the pulpit of a godly minister deceased. In the Lowlands of Scot-

* State of Religion, p. 21. † Ibid. p. 25.

land, when pious parish pastors have been succeeded by men of a very different class, it has been found, that the religious portion of the parishioners have either, partly, become Dissenters, or, in the course of years, died out, and that there has been no succession; and that, after a long incumbency of a carnal character, so indifferent have the parish been to the next appointment, that they paid little or no attention to it. "But in the north, their experience is different; for if they have the misfortune to have a careless pastor succeed one who has been the instrument of a work of grace in the parish, though he should live forty years among them, the people are found to be as much alive to the concerns of religion, and as earnestly desirous to obtain a good minister, as their fathers were at his predecessor's decease;"* and this effect is, with justice, mainly ascribed to the instrumentality of "speaking to the question," together with the other abundant and ceaseless exercises of a religious nature for which it qualifies the people, and to which it prompts them.

The second fact is one of a still more striking character, and which still more severely tests the power and importance of the general principle, which we have laid down, and are contending for. Multitudes have emigrated from Ross and Sutherland, to Cape Breton, whither they have been followed by Christian missionaries. They inform us, that the "aged men have kept up their home habits of prayer meetings, Scripture readings, and catechisings—so that the new generation, reared in the wilderness, are actually thirsting for ordinances, and building themselves houses, in which to meet for worship, until the Head of

* History of Revivals, &c. p. 350.

the church shall, in mercy, send them pastors." On this remarkable fact, the writer already mentioned thus observes :—" Such examples are encouraging evidences of what *lay agency* may effect, and ought to make a strong impression on the minds of those, who object to the employment of missionaries in reclaiming our city population from the depths of ignorance and vice, unless they have received a regular theological education. Had we but a company of those sedate and prayerful Christians—characters who shine as lights in the Highlands—set afloat in each of our cities, we might soon see the scene of debauch turned into a place where prayer is wont to be made, and the eye inflamed with excess, raised in hopeful contemplation to heaven." * It will be remembered, that previous parts of this treatise bear similar testimony to the admirably conservative character of the Moravian and Wesleyan systems of classification and social devotion. We have to request, that the facts, now recorded, may be taken in connection with those parts of our plans, which relate to such classification and such devotion, as at once illustrative and confirmatory of their principles and provisions.

* History of Revivals, p. 351.

SECTION II.

OF VISITERS AND TRACT DISTRIBUTORS.

In all cases, many personal qualities, and, in some, the accidents of birth and station also, are necessary to make an efficient visiter and tract distributor. If the work is to be done effectively, it will be found at all times an arduous undertaking, and, in certain cases, peculiarly so. Natural fortitude will be occasionally of great service;—there is much of this attribute required in spiritual enterprises—greatly more, indeed, than most believe or can imagine, previous to experience. Fortitude, however, must be combined with tenderness, otherwise its value will be diminished, and it will be in danger of giving a hard and barbarous aspect to the character. A tender and an affectionate tone and air are above all price, in persons thus employed. This spiritual tenderness may, likewise, be most abundantly cultivated. The love of God—the example and Cross of Christ—the wreck of our common nature—and the state of our fellow-men, with many kindred objects of contemplation, supply enough to soften the hardest temperament. The Spirit of Grace, too, is always a Spirit of tenderness, so that much grace is closely allied to much feeling. Prudence, also, is an essential ingredient in the composition of the character of a visiter. Prudence is always studious of time, and place, and manner. She

accomplishes much more by management than by might. She feels, that it is a matter of great delicacy to enter even the poorest "Englishman's house, which is his castle;" and that, for the time being, even rags must be treated with respect. Prudence has been educated in the school of experience, and has there prosecuted the study of human nature—a study which she is pursuing still, and which is of the utmost importance to a Christian visiter. Wealth and station, other things being equal, are of immense value to this function; they supply many facilities for carrying on the labours of this calling. These accidents are useful among all classes; and to some classes they are the only passport. Indeed, for obvious reasons, they are more serviceable in this than in any other department of lay labour; and hence, all of this class, in a church, who are otherwise qualified to act as visiters, are in duty bound to take up their cross—if cross it shall be deemed—and to use the talent which God has given them for extending the knowledge of his Son. The first qualification, however, is piety—enlightened, settled, well-attested piety. In this description of piety, the fact of a *public profession* is assumed. Nothing can be more preposterous than the idea of a person, who has made no profession, going forth into any part of the Evangelical vineyard. He who occupies such a post of observation, must be not only avowedly pious, but eminently so—a well executed pattern of the religion which he seeks to press upon the attention of his fellow-men. To all these elements of fitness, he must add diligence—unwearied, zealous diligence—in the spirit of faith and love.

The preparation of visiters calls for no separate system;

it hardly admits of any. The ordinary means of grace, based on a good education, and the exercises of the district stations, will suffice to furnish an abundance of them. With respect to their appointment, the matter is exceedingly simple. Simplicity, indeed, is the life and soul of all such apparatus as that which we are now constructing; for nothing will work long and well, which is artificial and complicated. In reference to the district stations, at which the visiters are an important part of the general agency, nothing need be added to what has been previously laid down. With regard to those of the vicinity of the chapel, where it has been already proposed, that two visiters shall be united with each expositor; the appointment must, of course, lie with the pastor, subject to the approbation of the expositor. The reasons for giving the expositors an influence in such appointments are obvious. Their own comfort in the work, the general harmony, and the success of the combined instrumentality, greatly depend upon the agreeable character of each successive co-operator. Hence the importance of adopting all prudent means to secure that harmony, and especially of taking good heed, that, as much as possible, all fellow-labourers may be equally yoked together.

SECTION III.

OF SABBATH-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

Of all the classes of lay agents, Sunday-school teachers are the most numerous, and, in some respects, the most important. Their character, training, and office, are, therefore, matters of very great moment, as vitally affecting the best interests of the Church of God. The myriads of schools, conducted by this mighty host of religious instructors, are, at the present hour, influencing the destinies of the millions of England, and, through them, of the whole human race, to an extent which no man can fully estimate or comprehend. What, then, is the proper position of Sunday-schools, and how may they be rendered most conducive to their glorious end? This is now become a question of the highest order; and, with a view to its solution, we shall proceed to consider the relation of teachers to pastors, and of schools to churches—the qualifications of teachers—and the method of training them.

1. *The Relation of Teachers to Pastors.*

This is a point, on which considerable darkness yet rests, in many churches. Much ignorance, much error cleaves to it; and a variety of distressing evils has been the very general result. The facts of the case stand

thus :—The children of the church and of the congregation are as much the subjects of the pastoral charge, as are their parents. If, therefore, the pastor be, single-handed, able to instruct them, he is in duty bound so to do; but, if he be alone unequal to this undertaking, then he must call in proper assistant agency. When, however, he has done this, he does not surrender one particle of his pastoral authority ; neither does he shift one hair's breadth the grounds of his pastoral responsibility. According to the grand legal axiom—*Quod facit per alium, facit per se*—what he does by another, he does by himself, and he, therefore, is solely accountable for the manner of conducting the process of instruction. The schools composed of such children are merely juvenile portions of his flock ; and the teachers of them are his deputies in the delightful work of feeding the lambs. They have no ecclesiastical authority to collect a single class of such children, or to impart a single lesson, without his sanction. They have no more right to interfere with the children of the members, than with the members themselves. We have, indeed, already seen, that the children of the church are members equally with their parents ; whatever, therefore, be the number of the schools, or of the teachers, the pastor alone remains solemnly accountable to the exalted Head of the church, for every lesson that is taught, for every deed that is done, for the entire procedure of such seminaries. It is, therefore, clear, "that the pastor ought to know, intimately know, *who* and *what* the teachers are—how they teach—what they teach—and what impressions they are making."* Our future churches,

* Todd, p. 316.

in the persons of these juvenile myriads, are already in the hands of Sabbath-school teachers, who are laying the foundation of their characters—fashioning their judgments—cultivating their feelings—and moulding the whole of the coming man. Is there on earth a weightier consideration? The operations and influence of the national universities of Oxford and Cambridge, are but as deeds done in a corner—as the movements of a group of the humblest peasantry of our provinces, in some two small rural villages—compared with those of the Sunday-schools of the British empire! How necessary then it is, that pastors should awake to the claims of schools, and to their own duties in relation to their conductors! "If our teachers are not held responsible for what they do, and what they teach, to the pastor and to the church, woe be to the hopes of stability in the walls of Zion! In order to meet the case, the minister must not be cold, formal, indifferent; but his heart must warm over the school, as over his own children. The safety of our churches, their stability, permanency, order, purity, knowledge—all, under God, depend upon the character of our Sabbath-schools. That character cannot be what it should, and must be, if there is any deficiency on the part of our ministers." *

There is reason to fear, that the general state of things, in respect of this point, is very far from being satisfactory. Many, very many, pastors do not seem to be at all awake to their duty, in relation to it. Schools, composed chiefly of their own especial infant and youthful charge, are apparently, in their view, either beneath their notice, or beyond their

* Todd, p. 317.

sphere. They have little or no intercourse with them. The competency, character, and labours of the teachers, are regarded as a concern which belongs not to them. They are treated, in their corporate capacity, as separate, distinct, and wholly independent bodies, between whom and pastors there is no relation or connection whatever. If pastors step into the schools occasionally, it is, apparently, to be considered an act of clerical courtesy, and not of pastoral duty. As to training teachers for the work—or as to instructing and improving those who are in it—encouraging and cheering them on their way—considering and treating them as assistants in the ministry, and holding themselves the responsible heads and chiefs of such institutions—no class of thoughts seem more foreign to the minds of a vast body of pastors. The magnitude of this error is to be measured only by its deplorable results to the best interests, equally of the schools, of the churches, and of the kingdom of Christ at large.

There is another, and an exactly corresponding error, somewhat prevalent among teachers—an error which has most naturally and necessarily sprung from that just noticed. The teachers in question have, in effect, taken ministers at their word;—they have virtually declared their independence both of pastors and of churches;—they are, in their own view, a totally separate body, with whom neither the pastor nor the church has any right, in any way, to interfere. Under this most unnatural and most baneful state of things, "The pastor is shut out, as if the school were altogether in other hands, and as if there were danger of his usurping power, were it possible. By a refined,

but sure process, he is cut off from all sympathy with the school. When he goes in, he is treated like a stranger; and the consequence is, he does not often go. Just the reverse of this, should be the course pursued. This school is his flock, and the teachers are his helpers in instructing and feeding that flock."* How matters go in America, Mr. Todd is well able to judge; it is but justice, however, to a multitude of honourable and Christian men in England—to the bulk, indeed, of the teachers of the British empire—to say, that, wherever this conduct takes place in a school, it is invariably found to be in a bad condition; and that its superintendent is empty, though uplifted; vulgar, though ambitious; weak, though tyrannical; and incompetent, though filled with pretensions; and that the teachers, or the body of them, are persons equally without piety and without sense. We have known no exception to this rule, and we confidently believe there is none. With the bulk of teachers, even of those in schools founded upon the erroneous artificial principle, the complaint is not of the pastor's interference, but of his indifference! They instinctively feel the need of his countenance, instruction, and superintendence; they earnestly entreat his attention; and when it is given, they gratefully receive it as a favour, a privilege, and an honour for which they cannot be sufficiently thankful.

It is important, to inquire into the original cause of these evils. This will be of equal service for the work of correction, and of prevention. They have all arisen solely from the neglect of the great principle laid down in a previous section, which requires, that every movement of an

* Todd, p. 165.

evangelical character shall be congregational, sustained by the church, and conducted by the pastor. Every Congregational church, as we have already urged, comprises within itself whatever is necessary to the instruction and edification of both old and young—supplying at once both the pupils and the teachers. The Christian tuition of the young is merely one mode of the manifold operations of that organized body, all whose movements must be headed and led on by its rightful ruler, its constituted pastor. When, at the Reformation, Christian ministers awoke from their protracted slumber—and began to diffuse that knowledge, for lack of which the people had been perishing—it was their duty, as soon as they found themselves inadequate to the whole burden of instructing, at once, the old and the young, to have selected proper persons from among the faithful to assist them; and it was further their duty, to have used all proper means to augment their competency, while they apportioned to each of them their several spheres of labour, according to their then existing fitness. Having done this, they should have reserved in their own hands the entire general control and management of the schools, watching over all, as "they that must give an account." If the school required more of the pastor's personal presence than he could conveniently afford, then he ought to have appointed a superintendent to act as his representative. The superintendent, in such a case, ought to have been a man of his own choosing, not an elective sovereign chosen by the teachers, as is now the case under the unnatural, artificial, lamentable, and wholly unconstitutional state of things, which we deplore and condemn. Had pastors attended, as they ought, to this, their duty—had

they every where taken the lead in the creation, establishment, and ordering of these auxiliary systems, Christian schools had every where rested on their proper foundation. But pastors, generally, did not take such lead: many stood aloof; some opposed; and not a few were parties to the establishment of schools upon the false foundation now repudiated. They did this in ignorance; and it was left to their successors to discover the error, and to feel, as well as see, it. As matters now stand, the position of schools is in many cases doubtful; and hence, many pastors have escaped the discharge of half their duty; and many teachers have, almost unconsciously, and, perhaps, unintentionally, been led to usurp a measure of the pastoral authority. A large proportion of schools have originated under the circumstances now specified; and hence their artificial and their unnatural position. Let things be rectified where they are wrong; and let every instrument sustain its proper and natural relation to the pastor. The teachers, as a body, are his assistants—nothing more—nothing less; their position is, therefore, one of the highest honour, of the most eminent usefulness—and such as may be coveted by the best and ablest men in the church of Christ. Teachers ought to be viewed as the pastor's right arm; they should be treated by him with all discriminating confidence and cordial affection—according to age and circumstances—as his sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, fathers, bosom friends! This is the natural state of things; no other will work harmoniously and efficiently. The pastor in his place—the teachers in theirs—all walking in love, and striving together for the salvation of souls, we shall yet see glorious sights—such sights as the

church of Christ has never yet beheld in our country. Let this evil, then, be universally and immediately rectified; and let all our Sunday-schools be placed upon their proper foundation.

2. *The Relation of Schools to Churches.*

This subject is nearly as little considered and understood, as that which relates to the teachers. In this case, although the subject of the relation be different, it is not less real and important. As the pastor has his appropriate share in the great work, so have the church theirs; and the full discharge of their duty is not less essential than that of his, to the complete success of the Sabbath-school system. The relation, however, is very extensively overlooked; and the duty is consequently neglected. Several serious errors on this point prevail among our churches, which ought to be instantly corrected. Of these, the principal are the following:—

First.—*The importance and necessity* of Sabbath-schools are points but very imperfectly felt, or comprehended, by most of the churches. They hardly ever, according to appearance, give the subject a serious thought. They identify it chiefly with the teaching of the children of the poor to read; and they consider, that, for such an object, the Sunday-school system is a very good thing; but they never seem, for an instant, to conceive of it as a great *theological institution* for laying the foundations of the Christian faith—as a school preparatory for pulpit instruction. Hence a large proportion of the children of the middle ranks never attend it. The schools are chiefly composed of the children of the laborious poor, who, in this

great matter, are obtaining an inestimable boon, from which the offspring of the wealthier classes are excluded by parental pride, or parental indifference, or something still worse.

Now the fact is, that these schools—with great changes and improvements, we grant—are absolutely indispensable to the thorough religious instruction of children, of every rank of society. The sound cultivation of human souls supplies work enough for many hands. When the ablest and most pains-taking parents have done all that can be done, at their own fireside, an abundance of further benefit may still be derived from an attendance at a well-conducted Sabbath-school. But there are multitudes of pious parents, whose early disadvantages were such, that they are not able aright to instruct their families. Then there is the sad sisterhood of widows, with their fatherless little ones, who greatly require the spiritual aid of such seminaries. The fact is, that religious education cannot be conducted and finished, at home, with complete success, any more than secular education. Conceive for a moment, that public schools, of all kinds, were to be closed, and that parents should universally carry forward the education of their children under their own roofs, and say, what would be the result. Would one, in one thousand, be soundly educated? Now what *would* be the issue, in such a case, in respect of secular training, *is* the issue, in respect of religious training. Of the entirely home-taught children, even of intelligent and superior members, there is reason to fear, that few, very few, are thoroughly instructed. Domestic tuition, of all kinds, under the existing state of society, wants system and order. We are, however, far from setting light by it, when properly conducted;

indeed, we attach to it a primary importance—an importance quite paramount;—we wish the instruction of the Sunday-school to be used only as a supplement, not as a substitute! The whole frame of our religious tuition must be improved. It will not be well with the churches, till almost all that is now done in our Sabbath-schools shall be performed in our families and day-schools. It is a deep, an indelible disgrace, for Christian parents to send their children to the Sabbath-school to be taught letters, or even first principles! All that parents can do, they are solemnly bound to effect. When all the drudgery shall once be done at the day-school, or at home—when once the Sabbath-school shall be wholly consecrated to religious tuition—and when once all its classes shall be progressively taught the theology of the Scriptures, in all the length and breadth of their ineffable fulness, by competent instructors—it will be the signal, that a new era in the churches' history is at hand. It is a subject for deep lamentation, that so much sacred time and sanctified talent, throughout all England, should be consumed in teaching children the art of mere reading. Oh! when shall it come to pass, that the Lord's day shall be wholly devoted to the culture of the hearts of our juvenile millions?

Second.—*The duty of every member*, whatever be his rank or station, who has the capacity to labour among the schools, and who is not fully employed in some other department of evangelical effort, is not generally understood, or felt, as it ought to be. The bulk of our teachers, as well as of our scholars, belong to the lower—some of the best of them, to the lowest—classes of society. To their praise we record it; thousands of our members, who toil hard

six days in the week, teach twice on the Sabbath, and twice they attend the house of God. This *they* do, while multitudes of our people, whom the bounty of Heaven has placed in very different circumstances, spend their sacred days in a very different manner, doing nothing for the glory of Christ or the salvation of souls! Sabbath-school work seems beneath them; it is apparently considered to be a degradation. Mistaken men! no rank, no station, is superior to this species of employment. Were that rank and that station much more exalted than most Congregational churches can boast, they would receive more lustre from the work than they could impart to it. In fact, the *primary* claim rests upon those members who belong to the wealthiest families;—on various grounds, instead of claiming exemption, they are bound to lead the way, and to set the example. Their station, influence, education, address—all are talents, which God has given them to use for his glory.

On this head, however, we must be allowed to indulge in bitter lamentation over nearly all the principal families even of Congregational churches, who, with a few splendid exceptions, stand wholly aloof from this great enterprise. A recent American writer could honourably boast, that some of the best talents in his country were "devoted to the work of giving instruction to children in Sabbath-schools." He could also present to Europe the example of persons, of the most illustrious rank, and the most exalted station in the great Republic, becoming "teachers of babes," and conductors of Sunday-schools. He could state, that "Governor Vroom, of New Jersey, the Honourable Theodore Freylinghuysen, a member of the United States' Senate, and ten or twelve of the most distinguished lawyers of

Philadelphia—Governor Tomlinson and General Whittlesley, of Connecticut—two or three of the judges of Pensylvania, and Mr. Starr, an eminent lawyer of Cincinnati—are also consecrating their gifted minds, and their time on the Sabbath, to the instruction of the rising generation." May England emulate and eclipse the laudable example! To the praise of Divine grace, she is already not without noble instances in the higher classes—and some, in the highest—of persons who consecrate time, talents, influence, and property to this blessed work. May the Lord increase their numbers!

Third.—*The duty of prayer*, in behalf of the schools, is very inadequately realized by the bulk of believers. In nothing, does the violation of our governing principle appear in so affecting a light, as in this great matter. A spirit of the utmost apathy concerning it pervades the mass of our churches, notwithstanding that it is a point of vital importance. Where is the church in England, that meets statedly or even occasionally, for the special object of offering prayer for their families and schools? Some there may be, or may have been, but they are few in number. How many of our churches ever met even *once*, to implore the favour of Heaven on this all-important work? Who among us has not heard of Dr. Payson's marvellous success as a pastor? Who has not read of his Bible classes, amounting to hundreds?—classes which were the chief source of the prosperity of his church! How did he succeed in collecting such numbers of young people? By what process did he excite parental anxiety, and arrest the levity of youth? He had, as we have already shown, a *monthly prayer meeting of the whole church for the Sab-*

bath-schools ! * Here lay the mystery of his might and influence; yet we find him recording, and lamenting, as among his deficiencies, the neglect of *special* efforts for their instruction and salvation! The blessing of Heaven apart—which will never be withheld from special believing prayer—no human device, as a moral means, can be compared with a monthly prayer meeting of the church, for awakening the attention both of parents and of children to the claims of the soul. We predict, with certainty, that the adoption of such a method would be attended with results the most beneficial to our families, schools, and churches.

When one sits down to consider the case, as it now exists in Great Britain, it presents one of the most humbling sights that can meet the view of a Christian observer. Behold a church, say, of six hundred members, and a Sunday school, of equal numbers. These children—the hope of the church and of their father's houses—meet from one Sabbath to another, avowedly to receive instruction in the Gospel of the Son of God. It requires, however, more than lessons to save a soul; this work is achieved not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. This great gift is promised, in answer to prayer. Is prayer presented for it? Yes; once a month, a few of the teachers meet alone, in the school-room, for prayer in behalf of the institution. The teachers!—a handful of young people, in many cases—most of them not heads of families, and, therefore, destitute of all parental feeling—not members of the church—not witnesses for God—and not at all decided in respect of personal piety, and self-

* Life, pp. 290, 315.

surrender to the Saviour. These are the suppliants! Is it really so? Is such the general order of things among the churches, or is it not? O ye pastors, deacons, members, fathers and mothers! Where are you? What is your high employ, which imperatively detaches you from the society of those who surround the throne of God in behalf of your offspring? Alas! most of you know nothing, apparently, of what is going forward. What a state of things is this to exist, even among the most enlightened and religious communities in Protestant England! Is it a marvel if, under these circumstances, your Sabbath-schools are not more productive of spiritual good? Is not this a true index to the feeling, generally, which prevails amongst you? Can you, dare you, with these awful facts staring you in the face, hold up your heads, in the sight of Heaven, and profess to be in earnest for the salvation of your children? O brethren, bear with us; suffer the word of exhortation! It is not thus that righteousness can be made to cover a nation—that a people can be turned to a pure language—and a generation be raised to serve the Lord.

3. *The Qualifications of Sunday-school Teachers.*

When things are set right, with respect to the relation of teachers to pastors, and schools to churches, then the next point is, to determine the qualifications necessary for this most important class of lay agents. Three subjects here demand our consideration:—personal piety —intellectual culture—and professional skill.

Personal piety is the first requisite.—Let none have part or lot in this business, whose personal religion is not

decided, and strongly marked. It is not enough even, that teachers be members of the churches; they must be lively, zealous Christians. The teacher is the pastor's delegate; and to discharge his duty he must possess his spirit. There is no more certain method of hardening the youthful heart against the things of God, and of raising up a race of hopeless infidels, than to send forth a shoal of unrenewed young men and women as Sabbath-school teachers. These will do the work of ruin infinitely better than those more ostentatiously wicked, but not more really unholy men, whom we now justly consider dangerous and pestilent.

The Sabbath-school is, merely, the Sabbath congregation in miniature. The end of both assemblies is the same. It is to worship God, to build up believers, and to convert souls. The losing sight of this has been the source of those manifold and multiform evils which have deluged our Sabbath seminaries; and it fully accounts for the lamentable want of success which attends them. The feeling which generally pervades them is too much that which rules and reigns in day schools—a feeling, that the acquisition of knowledge, the mere learning of "lessons," is at once the means and the end. A large proportion of teachers, as already hinted, are not even members of churches; they have neither piety nor gravity; but are young, thoughtless, frivolous creatures, many of them remarkable chiefly for their gaudy attire and their vain conversation. Yet this monstrous evil has found intrepid advocates. It has been boldly asserted, that many ungodly persons, who became teachers, have been converted by means of the school exercises; and, therefore, it is urged,

that we should admit such persons to be teachers, that we may benefit them. How preposterous! This presumption is truly shocking to a spiritual mind. Have not a number of ungodly men, in violation of every principle of the Sacred Scriptures, entered the Christian ministry, who have afterwards been converted in the exercise of its functions? Ought we, therefore, to give up our great Nonconformist principle, and admit floods of such men to our pulpits, that we may do them good? Have not a number of professedly religious people, in clear disobedience to the command of Christ, given their hands in marriage to the ungodly, and, through marriage, succeeded in converting them? Have not a vast number of persons committed crimes, and, on their way to the gallows, been brought to the knowledge of the truth? And are these things means of grace? Are men to be encouraged to the repetition of them as a path which may lead to life?

Alas! this is but one view of the question. For one such teacher as has thus been converted, a multitude have hardened themselves against God, died in unbelief, and helped on the perdition of the myriads of children, whose misfortune it has been to be under them! For one such minister as has thus been converted, a host have lived and died enemies to the Cross of Christ—have mightily contributed to oppose his kingdom, and to seal the doom of the unhappy multitudes, who have been their hearers. For one marriage, that thus terminates, five hundred have an opposite result, and end in the temporal, if not in the eternal, misery of the infatuated mortals who have defied the authority of the eternal God, which

prohibits unequal matches, and enjoins believers to marry "only in the Lord." It is high time, therefore, to rescue this most important species of lay agency from the evils by which it has been corrupted and enfeebled, and to restore it to its own native purity and vigour. Congregational churches and pastors ought, therefore, to awake to the duty, with respect to reformation, which devolves upon them.

That this enormous and deadly evil should prevail in the schools of National Establishments of religion, is quite natural; its doleful principle is a part of their very constitution; but that it should ever have obtained so extensive a footing among the schools even of Independent churches, must be accounted for by other means. To do this is very easy. The moment churches forgot that they are a Sunday-school establishment, and the work became a separate, independent, voluntary affair; from that moment the fountains of evil were opened up; and it is only by returning to the great principle, that we can force back its pestilential waters. The argument is short and simple, and it may be thus stated:—"Let the question be plainly asked—'*What* is to be taught in our Sabbath-schools?' and the answer is plain—'*The way of salvation.*' Each child is to be trained up, so far as is possible, for the service of God. Need the question be discussed—'Who are to be the guides, as a general rule, to lead the child to the Lamb of God?' It certainly is a work, which none but a pious heart can appreciate; it is to be done by means, which none but a heart taught of God can understand or use; and it requires a continuance of

virtues, which none but a renewed heart can exercise. I am confident that I speak the language of thousands, when I say, that, as a parent, seeking the best, the eternal welfare of my children, I should not, could not, commit such interests into hands which were not guided by a pious heart. My *own feelings* have done more to convince me, and to enlighten me, on this point, than pages of argument. We want more than the *professor of religion* for our Sabbath-school. We want *holiness*—that holiness which, in times that try men's souls, would give up all, and go even to the stake, with the song of life upon the tongue." *

Let none be employed in the schools who are not members of the church; but let it not be considered, that, because they are members of the church, they must, therefore, possess piety sufficient for the service of the schools. It is not enough, that they are hopefully converted; they must burn and shine as lights in the world. In the formation of new schools, it will be easy to establish them on the proper principle; the correction of the error in existing schools, however, will be more difficult, and will call for pastoral decision, combined with the meekness of wisdom, to uproot the evil, fortified, as it is, by a widely extended prevalence, and interwoven as it is, with personal predilections and prejudices. The only ground, however, on which it admits of the slightest rational defence, is that of necessity. Let that be

* Todd, p. 103.—We cheerfully avail ourselves of the advocacy of the writer, whose words have just been quoted, and rejoice in his extensive popularity, both in America and in England—a popularity which is well-merited—and do earnestly pray, that his views upon the point in hand, may obtain a universal prevalence, and a permanent establishment.

cut away, by an adequate supply of truly Christian agents, and the point will instantly be carried.

Intellectual culture is the second requisite.—The most gifted man, the most accomplished scholar, may, for want of certain qualities, make a very inefficient Sabbath-school teacher; but, other things being equal, he will make just the contrary, and have a vast ascendancy over men of inferior endowments. Intellectual cultivation is exceedingly desirable in Sabbath-school teachers, but he only knows the value of such cultivation, who possesses it; and there is much reason to fear, that the great body of our Sunday-school teachers but lightly esteem the value, for the want of the possession. A recent English writer, who had abundant opportunities of knowing the facts of the case, asserts that, "as it regards Sunday-school teachers, in general, comparatively little value is attached to mental acquisitions; fervently desirous of usefulness, in their grand design, they unhappily lose sight of the superior opportunities, which a well-cultivated mind would afford, of communicating instruction in an attractive and useful manner." *

To the above grievous statement of the Englishman, we have to add that of, perhaps, the most competent living American authority, as to the state of feeling upon this subject among the teachers of the United States, which runs thus:—"As a general thing, teachers, with whom I have been acquainted, have no adequate conception of the amount of furniture necessary, in order to teach a class in the Sabbath-school." † Of the general truth of these views, there, unhappily, can be no doubt.

* Davis. † Todd, p. 78.

This state of things is accounted for by the fact, that the immense proportion of our educated members stand aloof from the work.

Such then is the fact, and such is the main cause; but who shall estimate the *effect?* It is hard to teach what a man has not learned; it is not easy to wield instruments, of which men have not been taught the use; and what is not done with ease, can never be done with delight. This state of things serves, therefore, to explain the proverbial, and generally prevalent instability and irregularity of teachers; it shews why multitudes, after a few Sundays, retire and never return. An incompetent teacher, moreover, can never be an attractive one; where no pleasure is felt in imparting instruction, there can be very little felt in receiving it. This fact goes far to shew, why so many scholars are irregular, without positive departure; why so many become indifferent and disgusted, and withdraw; and why numbers, who remain behind, make so little progress. It also detects the cause of the rabid demand which exists for "keys," and "helps," and "assistants," and "guides," in relation to the subject of tuition—all which are so many crutches for aged decrepitude, or youthful impotence. It is in vain that we look for success, till we see rooted out from all our schools those badges of infirmity by which they are now so extensively disgraced. The mental vigour and moral health induced by proper spiritual food and intellectual discipline will bring these emblems of ignorance and incapacity to a perpetual end.

Professional knowledge is the third requisite.—It is, to all appearance, a very simple process, to sit down on a form

with a dozen of children, and, with book in hand, to hear them "say their lessons." This is, indeed, a very simple undertaking; and if this were all that is necessary to constitute a good teacher, an ample supply might be readily found; but that simple operation is only the prelude to the work of able teaching. Uncomplex and incapable of system as the operation may appear, yet a great amount of little things goes to constitute a good Sabbath-school instructor. There is much, indeed, which experience alone can supply; but a great deal of useful professional knowledge may likewise be communicated. The accomplished teacher is, the man who possesses both. There will be a vast increase to the instrumental power of the Sabbath-school, when we can have a sufficiency of teachers who have been raised up within it, and also thoroughly taught for this express purpose. The best foundation that can be laid for future usefulness in the work of tuition, is, unquestionably, a thorough course of instruction under one who is himself a well-practised master in the science. Few ever excel, as teachers, who have not themselves been pupils. In this case, practice combines with theory, and paves the way for its just comprehension; the experience thus acquired enables the student to test systems of instruction, to distinguish between the speculative and the practical, and to turn every thing to account.

4. *The Method of Training Sunday-school Teachers.*

"As things now are, we are woefully deficient in good teachers; I speak this, not to reproach nor to blame any who are teachers—they shall have great credit for what they are doing; but I know they are not so vain as to be

insensible that I am speaking nothing but the plain truth, when I say, that our teachers, as a whole, are far from being properly qualified. Perhaps most of them have done the best they could;—we are thankful to them, and we regret that they are not better furnished. But why are they *not* abundantly qualified? I put the question to every church—Why are they not qualified? And why are first-rate teachers so scarce? I reply, because the church has never yet felt this subject, nor attended to it."*

Whatever the churches can do, they ought to do; but we must principally look to pastors, under God, for a body and a succession of efficient teachers. It is clear, that this is a work in which churches, as such, have but little direct concern. Families may encourage their sons and daughters to devote themselves to it: generous youth, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, may humbly aspire to the honour of employment in it; on the part of the churches, it may, and it ought to be, a matter of constant prayer, that the Lord of the harvest would raise up labourers of this class; but beyond this, they can do very little more. The first point is, to obtain proper subjects; —and the second is, to train these subjects in a proper manner. When once the previous plans are brought into full operation, proper subjects will rise up in clusters. Assuming this, we are, at present, chiefly concerned to inquire into the best method of training them. The following plan is submitted as one, which will be found to meet the case, by rearing and sustaining a body of effective teachers.

1. Let two classes be established for the especial pre-

* Todd, p, 297.

paration and improvement of teachers—one for each sex ; both, for at least a time, to meet weekly with the pastor. When the first supply of teachers is fully prepared, and the schools put into proper motion, it may suffice, if the pastor's engagements require it, that these classes should meet on alternate weeks.

2. Let it be laid down, or understood, as a general rule, admitting only of such exceptions as peculiar circumstances may require, that all the young persons who are admitted as members of the church shall attend these classes, with a view to being qualified for the work of teaching.

3. Let it be established, as a general rule, that the superintendents, and the teachers, both old and young, shall punctually attend these classes for the sake of professional improvement. This rule must be steadily enforced, otherwise a most important object, which the practical pastor will readily comprehend, must be defeated. The only cases of exception must be those of practised and valuable teachers, whose engagements in life are such as to render their uniform attendance impossible. Such persons being already thoroughly trained, their presence is the less necessary for the sake of personal improvement, how much soever it might be desired for the sake of example. The pastor may, therefore, grant a dispensation to such, to the extent of their necessities ; but the younger teachers must comply with the rule, or otherwise, from whatever cause, they must be struck off the list of Sunday-school instructors.

4. Let the exercises of this class be of a nature peculiarly adapted to qualify and prepare teachers for their

work. The basis of all qualification is, of course, the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures; therefore, let much attention be paid, in the first instance, to the subject of Scripture criticism and exposition. Let doctrinal, polemic, and practical theology, in all its branches, bearings, and relations, be fully brought before them, so that every teacher may be thoroughly grounded in the great scheme of human redemption, and able, at once, both to state the truth, as it is in Jesus, and to defend it.

5. Let no persons be admitted as teachers, till they have entered the abovementioned classes, and till they have undergone a private pastoral examination. When this point has been settled, and the party has been approved by the pastor, let such party be always received in a solemn manner—in a manner calculated to impress them, and also parents, and the church, with the great importance and responsibility of the work. This point will be realized by attending to the provisions of the next rule.

6. There shall be a monthly prayer meeting of the whole church, in behalf of the schools, held in the chapel, say, on every third Monday, when all the teachers, for whom it is practicable, shall be present. At this meeting the pastor shall preside, and teachers shall be admitted once a quarter, more or less frequently according to cirstances; it is, however, obviously desirable, that there should always be two or three on each occasion, and that such occasions cannot occur very frequently. To prevent inconvenience arising from this, individuals, who have passed successfully through the pastoral examination, may be received into the school to act as teachers elect, till the time of their formal reception.

7. The admission of teachers shall be as follows:—The pastor shall first, at a proper period of the evening, read out the names of the individuals; then he shall deliver to them a short address, exhibiting the various subjects, which are more especially appropriate to their circumstances, at the close of which he shall declare them admitted, and offer prayer for the teachers generally, and for them in particular.

The value of this arrangement will be great beyond all calculation. Its operation upon the parties themselves will be exceedingly salutary, influencing at once the heart, and the life, and the discharge of the duties of their office, which they will thus be instructed to magnify. It will also have a most beneficial effect upon the hearts of parents, who will thus be emboldened to confide in the character and competency of the teachers—and upon the members of the church generally, who will thus be taught to look upon the body of teachers with more interest, respect, and affection—and particularly upon the schools themselves, all whose arrangements and instructions it will contribute to enoble and to dignify. The present mode of managing these momentous matters is, in all respects, most lamentably defective; and its results are most disastrous to the interests of Sabbath-school instruction, and, by consequence, to the advancement of both the knowledge and the piety of individuals, families, and churches. Let this course be pursued for seven years, and, through the blessing of heaven, the desert shall blossom as the rose.

In so far as mere plan is concerned, this will be found sufficient for all practical purposes. It is necessary, how-

ever, to make some observations respecting the best method of conducting the classes already mentioned, for training and improving both male and female teachers. Success will mainly depend upon that method; and that method will turn upon the tact and versatility of the pastor. An ability to conduct such classes, with an interest which shall never abate, is exceedingly to be coveted. Few things will so severely test a minister; and, we will add, not many exercises or occupations will more conduce to his general usefulness and influence, or supply to his own mind a more exquisite passing and retrospective pleasure. Success, however, in this exercise does not so much require profundity of knowledge, or extent of ability in a pastor, as very general information, and a perfect and immediate command of all his resources. In nothing will he more fully realize the benefit of extensive reading in history and biography, in polite and periodical literature. Kings, statesmen, generals, admirals, soldiers, sailors, travellers, philosophers, philanthropists, the school and the college, all science and all art, facts, anecdotes, maxims, poetry, and eloquence—all may find a legitimate place here, and be woven in and worked up, to confirm truth, to expose error, to illustrate Scripture, to develope the mysteries of human nature, and to minister perpetual interest to the attentive, intelligent, little didactic auditory. There is a special charm about a class so conducted, which is quite fascinating to the minds of generous youth, as well as refreshing and interesting to men of years, ability, and information. When such a class is fairly set in motion, if properly conducted, it will live for ever.

Simplicity and affection in the pastors, however, are in

the highest degree desirable; they are, in fact, essential. The teachers must feel perfectly at home, and come with the notion that they are going to meet their best earthly friend; the heavy restraint of a public service, or of an academic lecture, must have no place here, or else all is marred. A beneficial variety is also much to be studied. It will, however, be easy for the well-instructed pastor, who makes it his study, to gratify this innocent element of our intellectual nature. Let a pastor only set about it, in good earnest, and success is certain. Let his invention be ever on the wing, and he will gather honey from every flower. Let him, above all things, guard against *set discoursing* to the class. This will be fatal. In addition to the regular and more thoroughly theological exercises, which ought to be of a catechetical nature, after the manner of a Bible class, let the pastor give a lecture, say, once every quarter, on some special subject connected with self-instruction—always an agreeable theme to youth—or on Sabbath school teaching—or general education—or Scripture criticism—or Scripture geography—or profane geography—or church history—or astronomy—or religious poetry—or Protestantism—or Popery—or Missions—or on a thousand other subjects;—any thing which ingenuity can make to bear upon teaching, and the improvement of the intellectual and moral powers of the teachers. Let occasional essays also be prescribed to proper persons, and let them be read in the class, and followed by suitable remarks from the pastor. Let one of the weekly nights of meeting, also, be devoted to a quarterly conference, when the teachers of both sexes shall meet the pastor, and talk over the affairs of the school, or schools. Let there be also a half-yearly

teachers' tea meeting. Let there be, likewise, a good and wholly appropriate library provided for their especial use, the books of which shall be exchanged always at the weekly meeting. Let all these things be done, in the spirit of godly simplicity, and we shall wait, without anxiety, the report of truth upon the whole question of the experiment, cherishing the most perfect confidence—a confidence to some extent grounded upon personal experience —that the result will equal the most sanguine expectations. One thing we consider certain—that there is no other method whereby to accomplish this great undertaking. Let this method be fairly tried, that it may be determined whether it is, or is not, adapted to supply a generally acknowledged desideratum.*

SECTION IV.

OF CATECHISTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS.

THE catechists differ from the ordinary Sabbath-school teachers in this :—the catechists are composed of men more advanced in years and experience, both as Christians

* We want better teachers, and more teachers for all classes of society, for rich and poor, for children and adults. We want that the resources of the country should be directed to procuring of better instructors as its highest concern. One of the surest signs of the regeneration of society will be the elevation of the art of teaching to the highest rank in the community. When a people shall learn that its greatest benefactors and most important members are men devoted to the liberal instruction of all its classes, to the work of raising to life its buried intellect, it will have opened to itself the path of true glory.—DR. CHANNING.

and instructors, and are set apart to meet the case of disciples in similar circumstances, as already set forth in our exposition of the arrangements of the district system. The catechist occupies a middle position between the Sunday-school and the ministrations of the pulpit. The business of the catechist is, thoroughly both to ground and build up his disciples, in the truth, with respect to Gospel doctrine ; and to instruct them minutely and specifically, in reference to Christian ordinances and church polity. The Sunday-school teacher cannot properly deal with these latter great subjects, which require, in the learners, some degree of maturity of judgment and capacity of application. For the same reasons, his doctrinal discussions must partake much of an elementary character. Nor can the pastor, from the pulpit, deal with the subject of ordinances and of polity much more effectively. General discourses, on such points, go for very little. The instruction, to be thorough and efficient, must be personal, and less public, and in connection with a syllabus or text-book. The catechetical course, therefore, to be complete, must comprise four parts :—Gospel doctrine—the ordinance of baptism—the ordinance of the Lord's supper—and church government.

1. *Gospel Doctrine.*

The catechetical classes are to be composed of such as have passed through the course of school instruction, and who are thereby initiated and prepared for the catechist; and also of such adults as have not had the benefit of Sabbath-school tuition. The classes thus composed must be carried through a systematic course of instruction, and

thoroughly grounded in the whole scheme of Gospel doctrine. The want of solid and accurate knowledge of such doctrine, as previously stated, is but too general; it is deeply felt by multitudes of pious persons, and has greatly abridged at once their comfort and their usefulness. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance, that the whole mass of our youth should pass regularly through the hands of the order of catechists.

2. *The Ordinance of Baptism.*

This rite must be copiously explained, both as to the subject and the mode; and the practical duties connected with it must be carefully pointed out, and solemnly enforced. On this ordinance, the extent of the ignorance which prevails among great numbers of Pædobaptist Christians is scarcely credible. Nor can it be otherwise; for it is a point, upon which not one in a thousand ever received a single lesson of solid instruction. They are left to study the subject for themselves; or to live and die in utter ignorance of it, according to their choice. How shall that ignorance be removed? Not by the labours of the pulpit; nor, as to the multitude, by those of the press. Catechetical instruction alone can meet the case; and by this mighty instrument, wisely wielded, we may perform wonders. In relation to this subject, it is time for Pædobaptist pastors to do justice to their principles, and to their people; for only in this way can we eradicate from the heart of our churches the mischiefs connected with ignorance of the ordinance and abuse of it, which have been developed in a former chapter.

3. *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper.*

The establishment of classes for the explication of this most important subject will prove a most valuable addition to our present means of grace. Nothing is more imperatively demanded by the spiritual interests of the Congregational body. Instruction on this awful theme will be very eagerly embraced; for sacramental classes will be always popular, and numerously attended. While the world stands, this ordinance will continue to exercise a high control over the imaginations and hearts of all those who have in their bosoms the slightest portion of religious principle. It is in such classes, that the Popish errors which prevail upon the subject must be combatted and overthrown, and that the Popish feelings, which these errors have produced, must be opposed and rectified. It is only in such classes, that the mighty subject can be developed in all the length, and breadth, and glorious bearings, of its origin, nature, and object. It is in such classes alone, that the battle of truth, of Apostolic usage, and individual obligation, in relation to this rite, must be fought and won. Considering the state of the popular mind upon the subject, it is surprising, that sacramental classes, as a matter of course, are not established in every church throughout the empire.

4. *Church Government.*

The necessity for classes of this description, among the Congregational body, is exceedingly urgent; and that necessity ought to be speedily supplied. The Congregational body, and conscientious Dissenters generally, can no

longer afford to have multitudes among their people comparatively ignorant of their own principles. In former chapters, the importance of this knowledge has been made apparent; our chief concern, therefore, at present, is, with the most efficient methods of instructing our churches. The only plan is that which we now specify; and which, without the loss of one hour, ought to be carried into effect, in every fellowship over all the land.

To give full effect to this plan, FOUR TEXT-BOOKS must be provided for the use of these four classes. Such publications ought to be, in all respects, the most finished performances, that the combined talents of the NION, or of the empire, can produce. Various and vast advantages will result from such an enterprise. The simple publication of such works would be a great point gained to the general object; for as the sounding of the trumpet implies the presence of the enemy, so the exhibition of the implements indicates the work to be performed—and the supply of the apparatus will furnish a strong inducement for the pastors and churches to commence the experiment. Were the CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES to take the subject up, the success of the measure would be certain. The mere fact of the appearance of the works, under the sanction of that body, would operate as a powerful demonstration in favour of the great principle, as well as supply the ready means of reducing it to practice. The demonstration resulting from such an undertaking by the UNION would instantly and irresistibly carry the question with the mass of the churches, and conduct the experiment to general and triumphant success. The provision of such works will secure a beneficial uniformity of

instruction, of the highest order, throughout the churches of the UNION—of infinite moment to all its interests, whether intellectual, moral, spiritual, or denominational. The results of such an arrangement will be beneficial beyond expression or conception. No method can be devised so adapted to cement, extend, invigorate, and perfect the UNION. That body, too, could publish with advantages immensely superior to those of any private adventurer, whatever might be his gifts or his celebrity; and, by means of stereotype, they might multiply these works by millions, and bring them within the easy reach of the humblest child of the poorest church.*

Such is the only means of thoroughly grounding our people, and for accomplishing that most important object —the retention of the elder scholars, who, at present, for the most part, leave the schools, at the most perilous and important period of their lives, when it is of infinite moment that they should be kept from the paths of destruction, and restrained and upheld by all the influences of moral and Christian association—a period, too, when, for the first time, their powers have attained that maturity which renders them the proper subjects of a thorough intellectual and moral cultivation. By this means there will be variety, gradation, advancement, in the work of instruction; and a fair supply of necessary religious furniture ultimately imparted to every member of every Independent church in the three kingdoms.

* The best mode of producing these text-books would be by public competition, one after another, with the express understanding, that the successful treatises should be liable to such modifications as the committee might deem proper and necessary, prior to publication, and should be issued anonymously under their sanction.

A question of importance arises here—How are these catechists to be provided? This question may be most easily, and most satisfactorily answered. According to the plans already specified, there will be a sure, a constant, and an abundant supply of teachers, from year to year, poured into the schools; so that, unless there be, to some extent, a corresponding translation going on among them, the schools will be ultimately overstocked. The roll of the catechists is, therefore, to be supplied from the ranks of the senior teachers. By this means, we shall be receiving a constant augmentation of well-disciplined and effective men, for this most important and most honourable service. The arrangement now proposed will also throw a new element of activity into the schools, and keep the whole in healthful motion. The number of catechists can never become too great; for, if it can be accomplished, it would be exceedingly desirable that all the junior members, who have not had early advantages of instruction, should be ranged into catechetical classes, and put through the full course, which has been described.

The function of this instructor was a most important one in the ancient church. "The chair of the catechist of old was filled with the highest authorities, the finest talents, and the deepest learning." * Pantænus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Heraclius and Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Augustine of Hippo, were all catechists. Our Reformers, too, fully appreciated the vast importance of catechetical instruction, not simply to the young, but also to the adult portion of their people. It was felt to be the

* Archdeacon Bailey.

only method of successfully instructing mankind. The Reformed pastors, however, failed to work with due effect upon large numbers, for want of lay agency. Both at the time of the Reformation, and during the ages that followed, the office of catechist was discharged wholly by the ministers of the Gospel. Hence, in the older writings, we find a perpetual reference to the fact.—"There is no employment in the world," says Bishop Hall, "wherein God's ministers can so profitably employ themselves, as in this of plain and familiar catechising. What is a building without a foundation? If this ground-work, therefore, be not surely laid, all their divine discourses lie upon the loose sand, and are easily worked away by insinuative suggestions of false teachers. There is no one thing of which I repent so much, as not to have bestowed more hours in this public exercise of catechising; in regard whereof, I could quarrel with my very sermons, and wish that a great part of them had been exchanged for this preaching conference." To the same effect is the testimony of the famous Ostervald, who, in addressing his students, says—"When you commence ministers, you must labour chiefly to form a new generation. Of all the means you can employ for this end, catechisms are one of the most useful. They are far more important and useful than sermons; and it were to be wished they were generally substituted in their place; this is the true divinity. There were, formerly, no professors, as there are now. The catechists were considered the doctors in religion."

The fact is, that the species of schools, for which we are contending, is merely the resumption of an ancient

institution, which has unhappily sunk into decay. Mosheim declares, that the early "Christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the Scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their religion; and schools were every where erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the Christian church." He further testifies, "that the care of instructing youth was committed to persons, who were distinguished by their gravity and wisdom, and also by their learning and judgment." Such were the catechists of ancient times.

SECTION V.

OF DOMESTIC EXPOSITORS AND HELPERS.

The great requisite for these most useful classes of lay labourers is a profound and an extensive acquaintance with the sacred Scriptures. These are to constitute their text-book as teachers, and the great object of their daily study. They ought to possess the most thorough mastery over the Word of Truth; they should possess a ready command of all the main facts of its history, and all the great features of its several compositions, together with a deep insight into its doctrines. The proper school for the regular and efficient training and continuous improvement of these classes of laymen will be the district meetings, the

exercises of which will, without fail, raise up, in succession, a number sufficient to maintain a body of such assistants in the work of the Lord. It were well that the pastor should see, that each of them be furnished with a few of the choicest works on biblical criticism; and in particular that they have Horne's Introduction to the Study of the Sacred Scriptures. The best method, indeed, would be, to construct a small, well-chosen library for the special use of these orders of instructors. A limited number of the principal works on Biblical literature would amply suffice for every purpose.

SECTION VI.

OF LAY PREACHERS.

It will soon be easy to select, from the host of agency already provided and described, a sufficient number of well-instructed men to supply the district stations, and the villages, in the capacity of preachers. It will not be necessary to devise any special means for the theological culture of these labourers; but it will be very desirable to improve them in that knowledge, and in those intellectual habits, which appertain more especially to preaching. It is here that the Christian churches of the British empire, or rather their pastors, have so egregiously failed in their duty. They have taken no steps to raise up and

qualify lay preachers. Even the Methodists have been, in this respect, as defective as other bodies. They employ, but they do not prepare, their local preachers—a course which, among a people so sagacious, and so studious to adapt means to ends, is not easily accounted for.

The pastor should take great care, at the commencement, to select proper persons for this work, and then use the utmost efforts to prepare them for its due performance. Let none be chosen, but such as will cheerfully and gratefully submit to the necessary training. Let it be distinctly understood, that the relation which they sustain to the pastor is that of assistants; and that he is to be the sole judge of the qualifications of such as are honoured to act in that capacity. The following are the principal rules necessary to be observed with respect to the plan.

1. The first step is, to convene those who are considered to be proper objects for preparation, with a view to this employment, and to make arrangements for a weekly meeting.

2. All things considered, Saturday evening will be the best time for this meeting to be held, especially when once the system comes into full operation.

3. When the parties have been convened, and the night fixed for the weekly meeting, it will be necessary to take immediate steps to ascertain the real state of their culture and competency, if it has not been ascertained before. So soon as this point is settled, a plan shall be laid down for their preparation and improvement. That plan must provide for their several conditions.

4. Let it be ascertained whether all are acquainted

with the grammar of their own tongue: and let the younger portion, who are not, commence the immediate study of it. Let them be put in a proper way of prosecuting that study; and let the pastor frequently—weekly, if possible—examine into their progress.

5. Let exercises, in reading, be instituted by the pastor, with a view to the improvement of the preachers, when their errors or improprieties shall be kindly pointed out. In a short time, great and important improvements will be made by this means, and their competency largely increased. This is a matter of great moment; and no pains should be spared to acquire, in all cases, a style of natural and effective reading.

6. Let exercises of exposition, from time to time, likewise, be prescribed and performed. These shall be spoken, not written, or, at least, not read from a manuscript. The object of this exercise is, to improve the preachers in the habit of extempore speaking, and thereby to qualify them, in a profitable manner, thus to dispense the Word of Life. Such exercises should not exceed from fifteen to twenty minutes. The importance of this faculty can hardly be estimated; it merits all the attention that can possibly be given to it.

7. Let texts or subjects be given out, and let written plans, or outlines, be produced in manuscript, and read by the writer at the meeting, with such remarks by the pastor as he may see meet. This will be found both a pleasing and a profitable exercise to a body of devout young men—an exercise which will sustain a never-failing interest.

8. None shall be allowed to preach at any of the villages, or district stations, till he shall have entered this

class, and till the pastor be perfectly satisfied of his competency, and see it meet to appoint him accordingly.

9. The pastor shall make and keep the plan of the preaching stations; and he shall, likewise, from time to time, appoint the preachers. Such appointments shall always be made at the Saturday meeting, a week beforehand, that the preachers may have time to make suitable preparation.

10. When once the system of lay preaching shall have been fully established, and the first band of preachers shall have been tolerably prepared for labour, then candidates for the office shall be admitted to attend the preachers' weekly meeting—for a time as silent hearers, after which they shall be allowed to take part in the exercises. When such candidates shall have made considerable improvement, the pastor shall send them forth, one by one, occasionally with the senior preachers, for whom they shall open the service by reading and prayer; and this they shall do, from time to time, as he shall appoint, until he be satisfied that it is safe and proper for them to enter upon regular preaching engagements.

Such, then, is the method proposed for the provision and regulation of a body of lay agents for preaching the Gospel. By this constitution, the great governing principle, to which we have, every where, attached so much importance, is sacredly observed. This principle has been as much violated among lay preachers, in proportion to their numbers, as among Sabbath-school teachers; and such violation has been attended with consequences not less pernicious. They have too often formed a little independent, self-constituted, and self-regulated body,

entirely separate from the pastor and the church, hence all the manifold evils already depicted in our pages. Lay preachers never can succeed, to the extent desirable, without preparation; and whose province is it to prepare them? It is at once the province and the duty of the Christian pastor. Who shall judge of their competence? He, to be sure, who conducts their studies. Who shall appoint their sphere, and regulate their labour? He, of course, who has taken the gauge of their capacities and attainments, and who knows what they are fit for. They never can labour with comfort and success, but in union with their pastor, as sons in the Gospel. There ought to be, between them and him, the utmost confidence and cordiality—the most tender and fatherly regard on his part, and on theirs the most profound respect and affection. This constitution, therefore, is founded in nature; it is supported by reason; it is sanctioned by Scripture. It is confirmed by experience, which has proved that this system will work every where, and that nothing else will work, either for the good of souls, the prosperity of churches, or the glory of God.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE HARMONY OF THE PRECEDING ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE PRACTICE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES, WITH THE PRINCIPLES AND CONSTITUTION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES—AND THE RESPECTIVE PROVINCES OF CHURCHES AND PASTORS IN RELATION TO THE SUBJECT.

THE development of our plans commenced with the sixth chapter, in which were propounded general views of union, classification, and district division. When these views have been carried into practical effect, they will interfere in no degree whatever with the constitution of a Congregational church, nor change the position of a single particle of that celestial fabric. In the next chapter, which exhibits the divers departments of lay agency, the only important section, as affecting, even by apparent possibility, the constitution of the church, is the second, which details a system of district division, devotion, and labour. That system, however, when properly viewed, stands at the farthest possible remove from any invasion of the constitution of a Christian church. It is, in this

respect, no way distinguishable from a fellowship meeting, or a benevolent association. It is simply a body of external arrangements, which leaves the church as if it had never been. In point of fact, the most perfect harmony reigns between all our plans and the Congregational principle.

SECTION I.

OF THE PROPERTIES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLE.

That principle, rightly understood, is in the highest degree flexible with respect to the use of means for promoting the divine glory. Christianity, as dispensed in union with this principle, is "a religion of truth and love, unfettered by local circumstances, and adapted, without restriction of country or climate, to the minds of men, and the wants of the human race."* The Congregational principle asserts and maintains the sufficiency and exclusive authority of the Holy Scriptures—the right of private judgment—unrestricted liberty of conscience—the perfect independence of every church, with its right and competency to manage its own internal affairs. But, these points once settled, that principle leaves its happy subjects to walk at liberty through the entire length and breadth of the wide domain of evangelical labour and

* Douglas.

Christian benevolence—to walk singly, or in organized bodies—and to wield at will every species of spiritual instrumentality.

It has been allowed, indeed, that the Congregational principle "*tolerates*" the propagation of Christianity far beyond any other system—which is certainly praise of no common order—while, at the same time, it has been objected, that it *only* tolerates, but does not provide for, the diffusion of the Word of Life. This objection, however, is captious and unfounded. No scheme of church government makes such provision—no scheme can make it. The idea involves an absurdity. Government, strictly speaking, is a system of rule, not of conquest. Its province is, not to gather elements, but to control and conserve those with which it is already entrusted. This objection might, at the same time, be urged with tenfold force against Episcopacy, and against Presbytery, considered as systems of ecclesiastical polity.

The propagation of the Gospel, however, is secured by other means. The Saviour's own command, "to go into all the world, and preach it to every creature," amply provides for its diffusion among all true and enlightened believers. Even in the absence of any such command, the powerful instinct of compassion for the lost—which is implanted in the bosoms of all his people—necessarily leads to efforts for its spread, both at home and abroad, throughout the earth. Mere polity, then, has not much to do with the propagation of the Gospel—it may, indeed, as it has often done, abundantly hinder, but it cannot greatly help its diffusion — that great duty depends upon something of a yet higher and more ethereal nature. We

must rise then from Congregational polity to Congregational theology, and there we shall find, that what is wanting, and ought not to be looked for, in the former, is plentifully supplied by the latter. The history of British missions to the heathen, and of efforts to spread the Gospel among our home population, sufficiently demonstrate the true character of the Congregational polity combined with the Congregational theology, in relation to the work of missions both among the Pædobaptist and Baptist churches. It is a matter of fact, that these bodies, to a great extent, have led the way in this glorious enterprise. The Congregational principle, if it does not require, at least freely permits, every church to become a society of propagandists. The orders of officers in such churches are only two; but the number of those who may spread the truth, according to their individual measure of knowledge and of faith, and according to the existing necessity, is, or it may be, just as large as the number of members.

True Independency is an all-comprehensive system of instruction; it welcomes all as pupils to its first order of classes, although it admits to its second order only professed believers of the Divine testimony. Its authoritative proclamations extend to all whom its voice can reach; it supplies instructors adapted to the various classes and gradations of mankind under its tutelage. Visiters, teachers, catechists, exhorters, lay preachers, district itinerants, missionaries to the heathen—all these functionaries are supplied, cherished, and employed by Independency, and cordially admitted by the Congregational principle.

It has been incorrectly represented as "overlooking the relation of stated hearers to their recognised teacher, and of stated worshippers to the church"—and also "the responsibility of the church in regard to the Pagan population within its diocese." Independent pastors and churches may be chargeable with such neglects, but not the Independent principle. This truth is clear from the fact, that the system laid down in this work, with all its multiplied provisions, is in perfect unison with that principle.

SECTION II.

OF THE PRACTICE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

THE system here set forth is in full harmony, too, with the primitive practice; and the true character of that practice may be correctly ascertained by an appeal to the New Testament. There is not a point, for which we have contended in this treatise, which may not be most satisfactorily reconciled to the usage of the Apostles, as recorded in the book of the Acts of those heavenly messengers. Nothing can exceed the free and liberal manner in which the subject of individual effort for the diffusion of the Gospel is mentioned in that wondrous narrative. All rational controversy upon the subject is for ever set at rest by the following passage:—"There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and

they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison. Therefore, they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word."* By this Scripture the matter of preaching is settled; but it will be difficult to show, that these preachers did not, at the same time, administer the ordinance of baptism to such as believed.

Let us pause a moment to contemplate this great matter. It merits more notice than it has yet obtained from any of the commentators. The fact is soon stated: on examination, however, it will appear to have been an event to which there is nothing at all equal or parallel since the foundation of the world. The whole church were scattered abroad, "except the Apostles." Of how many did this church consist? Some conception may be formed of their numbers from a glance at the history. For wise and beneficent ends, it hath pleased the Spirit of all grace, to construct this part of the narrative in a manner somewhat remarkable. We have a reiterated statement of numbers, and other expressions respecting augmentations, from which a tolerably correct idea may be formed of the multitudes who were thus scattered abroad, for the general and simultaneous illumination of Judea, Samaria, and the regions round about. The first intimation presents us with a list of disciples comprising "one hundred and twenty;" the second announces an addition of "about three thousand" in one day; the third, that the "Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

* Acts viii. 1—4.

Further accessions soon took place, when "the number of the men was about five thousand;" it is afterwards recorded that "the number of the disciples was multiplied"—that "the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." *

Now, considering the peculiarly chastened character of this history, and the utter absence of all exaggeration in the language of its statements, it really seems to us a moderate estimate, when we take the male disciples at from ten to fifteen thousand, and the female disciples and youth at a much larger number. This great multitude went every where preaching the word. "Now, were all these outwardly called to preach? No man in his senses can think so. Here then is an undeniable proof of what was the practice of the Apostolic age. Here you see not one but a multitude of lay preachers—men that were sent of God." † Arguments of the utmost strength might also be drawn from the remaining portion of this history, as also from the Apostolic Epistles; but this single instance abundantly suffices for our present object.

Having ascertained the true state of the case, in the days of the Apostles, it is of comparatively small importance what views were entertained in after-times. It may nevertheless serve to confirm the views which we entertain of Apostolic practice, if we find the same order of things prevailing in the ages that succeeded them; and that such is the fact, may be clearly shown from the writings of the first three centuries. The order of things which prevailed in the days of the Apostles was still

* Acts i. 15; ii. 41, 47; iv. 4; v. 14; vi. 1, 7.

† Wesley's Works, vol. v. p 489.

plainly discoverable at the close of the second century. Necessity, where it existed, was still the great law of procedure upon this subject. Laymen, with the sanction of the bishops, under certain circumstances, were still permitted to teach and to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus, and even to administer the ordinance of baptism. This permission was grounded on necessity, and not otherwise to be exercised; hence the orderly and proper declaration of Tertullian, that—"Therefore, it ought to suffice them, to use this power in necessities, when the condition of the place, or time, or person, requires it; for then their charitable assistance is accepted, when the circumstance of one in danger presses them to it—and in this case he would be guilty of a man's destruction, that omitted to do what he lawfully might." *

Another instance, out of a multitude which might be adduced, may be taken from the latter half of the fourth century. Hilary, a deacon among the Romans, a man of learning and discernment, in an exposition of the Epistle to the Ephesians, declares, that "after churches were established in all places, and officers appointed, things were conducted in a manner different from that in which they commenced; for at *first all taught and all baptized*, at all times and seasons, as necessity might require." A little after, he adds: "Peter had no deacon with him when he baptized Cornelius with all his house; neither did he himself administer the ordinance, but he ordered those brethren to do so, who had gone with him to Cornelius from Joppa:" and again: "That the people might increase and be multiplied, it was allowed to *all at the*

* De Baptismo, c. 17.

outset, both to preach the Gospel, and to baptize, and to expound the Scriptures in the assembly." *

These passages at once show the light in which the men of the first ages viewed the Apostolic practice, and then disclose the practice which obtained among themselves. It is clear, therefore, that primitive practice went much further than any thing for which we now contend; but we freely confess, that, under similar circumstances, we are quite prepared to go to the same lengths. It is enough, however, to have demonstrated, that such practice and the system here laid down, as far as the latter goes, are in perfect harmony.

Had Scripture and ecclesiastical history been silent, both as to command and example, relative to this point, the question might speedily be set at rest, by the unalterable decision of common sense. Man is debtor to man; all are stewards for the common Parent of human kind. If I have what is necessary to the very life of a fellow-creature, a brother of the species, it is at my peril to withhold it. The greatest promoter of this kind of agency in modern times defends it on this principle. Adverting to many instances, in which his knowledge of medicine had saved the lives of men, he thus applies the fact:—"Now, ought I to have let one of these poor wretches perish, because I was not a regular physician?

* Postquam omnibus locis ecclesiæ sunt constitutæ, et officia ordinata, aliter composita res est, quam cæperat; primum enim omnes docebant, et omnes baptizabant, quibus cunque diebus vel temporibus, fuisset occasio. —Neque Petrus diaconos habuit quando Cornelium cum omni domo ejus baptizavit; nec ipse, sed jussit fratribus qui cum illo ierant ad Cornelium ab Joppe.—Ut ergo cresceret plebs, et multiplicaretur, omnibus inter initia concessum est et evangelizare, et baptizare, et Scripturas in ecclesia explanare.—*Comment. in Eph.* 4. *apud Ambr.*

To have said, 'I know what will cure you, but I am not of the college; you must send for Dr. Mead?' Before Dr. Mead had come in his chariot, the man might have been in his coffin! And when the doctor was come, where was his fee? What! he cannot live upon nothing. So instead of an orderly cure, the patient dies; and God requires his blood at my hands!"* Here the analogy holds, so far as it goes, but the figure is utterly inadequate to express the mighty subject, which it is intended to illustrate. If such, then, is the force of the principle, when applied to the body and time, what shall be said of it, in relation to the soul and eternity?

A defence of the Moravian Brethren's labours, by one of their Indian converts, will form an appropriate additional illustration. A trader, whose religion appears to have consisted chiefly in the zealous entertainment of high church notions, was urging upon the Indian as a very serious consideration—that the Brethren were not "privileged teachers." The honest Indian calmly replied:—"It may be so; but I know what they have told me, and what God has wrought within me. Look at my poor countrymen there, lying drunk before your door! Why do you not send 'privileged teachers' to convert them? Four years ago, I also lived like a beast; and not one of you troubled himself about me. But when the Brethren came, they preached the Cross of Christ; and I have experienced the power of His blood, so that sin has no longer dominion over me. Such are the teachers we want."†

* Wesley's Works, vol. xii. p. 87. † Loskiell, part ii. p. 55.

SECTION III.

OF THE PROVINCE OF CHURCHES IN RELATION TO EVANGELICAL AGENCY.

To what extent are churches, as such, required or entitled to interfere with the various classes of lay agents which have been specified? It cannot be shewn, from the New Testament, that they have any, the slightest, ground of interference at all. The Scriptures are silent upon the subject. If there be any such ground conceived to exist, it must be wholly theoretic; and we unhesitatingly deprecate all such theories as entirely without foundation in reason, or in the word of God. This system of agency is a matter, which, in no degree, enters into the constitution of Congregational churches, in the usual acceptation of that term. They may exist—they have too long and too largely existed—without any such arrangements being attached to them, or growing out of them; and most of these arrangements might exist for a season, in connection with an individual Evangelist and a body of believers independently of an organized church.

Wherever popular aid is required, in whatever shape, whether in that of labour, or of contribution, or of any other, as a general rule, the body of the faithful must be convened, and their concurrence obtained, before the

measures in question, be adopted. Due consideration, however, should be given to distinguish cases, in which this concurrence is required, from those in which it is unnecessary, and in which the solicitation of it would be preposterous. In the adoption, for example, of our plan for the district division of the churches, it would be necessary to lay before the assembled church a general statement of the plan, and its objects, and to obtain from them a general expression of concurrence and co-operation; but, in all that follows, the operations must be carried on through the regular channel of the government as vested in the pastor. His hand must be every where seen; his impelling power and guidance must be every where felt; and the substantial and diversified benefits thence arising every where enjoyed.

We really hope it is unnecessary to argue at length a point so very clear; although it is certain, that erroneous notions respecting it still prevail in many quarters—notions as pernicious in their consequences as they are unfounded in Scripture.* Would that some persons were

* The following characteristic passage from Mr. Finney's Lectures on Revivals of Religion—a new edition of which has just been published by Snow, under circumstances, which, in conjunction with its unprecedented cheapness, ought to obtain for it a very extended circulation—presents a pleasing picture of the progress of this most important question.

"1. *Lay Prayers.*—Much objection was formerly made against allowing any man to pray, or to take a part in managing a prayer meeting, unless he was a clergyman. It used to be said that for a layman to pray in public, was interfering with the dignity of ministers, and was not to be tolerated. A minister, in Pennsylvania, told me, that a few years ago he appointed a prayer meeting in the church, and the elders opposed it and turned it out of the house. They said they would not have such work; they had hired a minister to do the praying, and he should do it; and they were not going to have common men praying.

"Ministers, and many others, have very extensively objected against a

as jealous of themselves as of their pastors! Would that they kept up as constant an alarm, lest they should fail in their duties, as they do, lest they should be robbed of their rights! This, however, is a malady for which logic supplies no medicine. It must run its course, and spend its power, and none can hinder it. There is, however, reason to believe that its "hour and power" are fast drawing to a close, and that soon its reign will expire for ever.

layman's praying in public, *especially* in the presence of a minister; that would let down the authority of the clergy, and was not to be tolerated. At a synod held in the state of New York, there was a synodical prayer meeting appointed. The committee of arrangements designated beforehand the persons who were to take a part, and named two clergymen and one layman. The layman was a man of talent and information equal to most ministers. But a doctor of divinity got up, and seriously objected to a layman being asked to pray before that synod. It was not usual, he said; it infringed upon the rights of the clergy, and he wished no innovations. What a state of things!

"2. *Lay Exhortation.*—This has been made a question of vast importance, one which has agitated all New England, and many other parts of the country, whether laymen ought to be allowed to exhort in public meetings. Many ministers have laboured to shut up the mouths of laymen entirely. Such persons overlooked the practice of the primitive churches. So much opposition was made to this practice, nearly a hundred years ago, that President Edwards had actually to take up the subject, and write a laboured defence of the rights and duties of laymen. But the opposition has not entirely ceased to this day. 'What! a man that is not a minister, to talk in public!—it will create confusion; it will let down the ministry: what will people think of us ministers, if we allow common men to do the same things that we do?' Astonishing!

"But now, all these things are gone by, in most places, and laymen can pray and exhort without the least objection. The evils that were feared from the labours of laymen have not been realized, and many ministers are glad to induce laymen to exercise their gifts in doing good."

SECTION IV.

OF PASTORAL DUTIES AND PREROGATIVES RELATIVE TO EVANGELICAL AGENCY.

The Christian pastor, according to the sacred Scriptures, is constituted both the teacher and the ruler of the church, of which the Holy Spirit hath made him overseer. He is, under Christ, the head and chief of the institution with which he stands connected. He is the organ through whom is administered the code of laws, by which the kingdom of heaven is regulated. He is, their sole administrator. He is, likewise, the instrument by whom those truths are promulgated, which bring health and cure to the human soul. He is the only authorized and responsible instructor of the faithful. All other teachers are subordinate and auxiliary to him. The entire system of tuition, likewise, which emanates from the church, is wholly under his superintendence. This duty devolves exclusively on him, not on the church; for he alone has the "rule" over that part of the kingdom, which Christ hath assigned him; and that rule extends to every thing which can constitute its subject. The pastoral prerogatives, nevertheless, exist only for the discharge of the pastoral duties—they are co-ordinate, co-extensive, co-existent—and they both cease and determine at the same time.

Such is the established constitution of things in the

church, with respect to the pastor—a constitution which is not simply right because it exists; but which exists because it is right, and which is founded in the nature of things, as connected with the "body of Christ." It is the province of the pastor to "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The work of the ministry, therefore, largely consists in "the perfecting of the saints"—in "the edifying of the body of Christ, till they all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The church is a school in which men are to be taught "the knowledge of the Son of God," and of which the pastor is the appointed rector and teacher. From this school all regular evangelical agency must issue. Whether that agency present itself in the character of visiters, teachers, catechists, expositors, preachers, or any other species of helpers—as it has been previously the subject both of pastoral instruction and of pastoral government, so, in both respects, it remains unchanged. With regard to the whole body of those agents, to judge of their fitness, to assign them their portion in the vineyard, to regulate their labours, to supervise their entire procedure, to change their sphere, to raise them to other departments, to suspend or remove—all this is the sole and undivided province of the spiritual governor, and is indispensable to the executive part of his office.

How far this order of things is founded in nature will at once appear, if it be considered that this high prerogative grows out of an antecedent duty—the duty of personally instructing and training these agents. This single

circumstance serves at once to explain and defend it. While the *right* of appointment arises from the pastoral office generally considered, the qualification for the exercise of that right arises from the duty of instruction. He alone is capable of ruling the agencies, and of regulating their operations, by whom they are taught and trained for their employments. The knowledge of character, talents, attainments, tempers, and habits, essential to the one, can only be acquired by means of the other. Training and control are, therefore, in this case, inseparable. This view is supported equally by reason, by analogy, by primitive usage, and by the sacred Scriptures—all unite to show, that it is the true constitution of things, relative to evangelical agency. By vesting this authority in the bishop, we give simplicity, unity, and energy to the whole system.

There is another light, in which the subject may be considered—and grave, indeed, ought to be the consideration—*no other system will work; but this will work powerfully and well every where, and for evermore.* This principle of management must be conceded, or the whole question of lay agency must be given up in despair. All plans, however excellent, in which this principle is violated by artificial theory, or neglected by apathy, or opposed and thwarted by the rage of an ultra democratic spirit, will prove abortive.

It is painful to be under the necessity of arguing a point so clear, and placed so far above the reach of all reasonable contradiction. There are those, however, who seem to look upon Independency as a species of polity where there is little law and not much government—where every man

may do what seems to be right in his own eyes, with respect to evangelical operations. There are also those, who appear to think that there is no limit to the democratic principle, and who entertain most erroneous conceptions of the relative position of the shepherd and his flock. These conceptions are, indeed, crude, dark, and undefined; but they are strong for mischief, and frequently obstructive of all efforts at Gospel diffusion. The perpetual tendency of the spirit embodied in these conceptions is to subvert the rightful authority of the pastorship. The pernicious nature of this spirit is never more strikingly apparent, than in matters which relate to lay agency, for the good of souls. The end is lost through a mistake in the way. This error requires that the church shall usurp the place of the pastor, and attempt the discharge of his proper functions; thence, oft-times, arise strife and confusion, while the work of mercy is marred at the very outset. This error, blind to the absurdity of vesting the government in the body to be governed—the executive in the multitude—insists that every thing shall be done through the church, and that this is essential to the maintenance of the Congregational principle. According to this scheme, the agencies that we have specified, the visiters, teachers, catechists, expositors, helpers, lay preachers—all must be chosen by the church in public meeting assembled. In like manner must they be appointed—suspended—and removed. Every thing, however insignificant, must be effected by the assembled church. Preposterous folly! The utter impracticability of proceeding, in this way, to any good purpose, has been a thousand times demonstrated, and that demonstration a thousand times forgotten.

Can mind be cultivated, and men prepared for divers and difficult functions, by a public vote of the church? Can individual character be analyzed, and fitness for particular spheres be determined, by a public vote of the church? Can the improvement of the various classes of agents be permanently carried forward by a public vote of the church? Can the innumerable acts of superintendence, necessary to the stability and efficiency of systems of lay agency, be exercised by a public vote of the church? This, and much besides, which the wisdom of heaven has assigned to the pastor—and which none but the pastor can perform—churches have attempted, but have found it impossible to effect. To remedy the overwhelming evil, the power of the churches has been concentrated in small committees—a measure which, though more plausible, has, for the most part, been very little more successful. As waters never rest till they reach their level; as rolling bodies cannot stop till they repose upon their centres; so systems of evangelical agency will never work, till they be carried on consistently with the principles of the constitution of the church of Christ.

The conclusion, then, of the whole matter is this: the Congregational principle is wholly compatible with our governing principle, both as to departments and agents. These principles clash in no respect whatever. Were it otherwise, we should be led to question, whether the Congregational principle were founded in Scripture; for lay agency is indispensable to the conversion of the world; our governing principle is equally indispensable to the full operation of that agency—and we should be slow to

believe in the divinity of any principle which stands in the way of the world's conversion. The ends of church government must ever be the same as the ends of the Gospel of Christ. This is accordingly the chief distinction and the glory of the Congregational system. The ends of the Gospel dispensation are, to make men holy, and then to make them useful, and thus to make them happy; "And this the Congregational system eminently does. While other systems exclude the laity from ecclesiastical affairs altogether, or in a great degree, regarding them only as worshippers and tax payers, the Congregational churches devolve upon their members the responsible duties of discipline and government. They are thus called habitually to act together. Their wisdom and piety are habitually put in exercise; and by this means are necessarily increased. Each church is a school of mutual instruction in the great principles and precepts of the Gospel; where the younger are benefited by the experience of the older, and all by the collected wisdom of the body, and by that of the pastor, their common guide. And the result is strikingly obvious, in the known practical character of this body of Christians. Look at their movements in all the practical concerns of religious and social life. Look at their colleges, and schools, and other institutions, designed and sustained by them for the good of the world. Look at their efficiency in missionary operations, and in all movements of reform. They are not merely devout worshippers within church walls, and decent people without; but, notoriously and eminently, they are intelligent, liberal, and efficient business Chris-

tians. They *serve* God as well as worship him."* Their pastors are fully permitted, if not imperatively required by their principles, to provide for the culture and the employment of all the gifts and graces of all their members; and to sit at the helm of all their evangelical movements, pouring successive floods of light upon their assembled minds, fitting them for usefulness, and guiding their feet into the paths of him who went about doing good.

* Mitchell's Guide to the Principles and Practice of the Congregational Churches of New England, pp. 72, 73.

CHAPTER X.

CONSIDERATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE CHURCHES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL BODY, WITH THEIR BISHOPS AND DEACONS.

"In a battle, every man should fight, as if he were the single champion; in preparation for war, every man should think, as if the last event depended on his counsel. None can tell what discoveries are within his reach; or how much he may contribute to the public safety."* We have, accordingly, endeavoured, in this treatise, to embody the experience of the church of God, in several ages, and in different countries; and, in adjusting the plans now specified, we have availed ourselves of personal experience, and somewhat extended observation. It is hoped, that a supply of materials is here presented, on which the intelligent minister may go to work with advantage. Many of the views may require modification, to meet the condition of particular churches. Much will depend upon time, place, and circumstances; but most of all will depend upon pastors. They must be the grand moving spring, in all evangelical operations;—if they lead, their flocks will follow. With energy and

* Dr. Johnson.

prudence, well-digested plans, and working churches, what may Christian pastors, under God, not accomplish? Let pastors, therefore, move, and all will be motion round about them. Let them prayerfully, prudently, and with all perseverance, go on to agitate questions of benevolence, and of piety. Let them enter heartily upon plans and experiments; and some portion of success will invariably and infallibly follow. Pastors, however, are men, and most men naturally love repose, and are averse to a change of habits and to the adoption of new courses. The time, however, has at length arrived, when both pastors and people, of the Congregational churches of England and Wales, and of Scotland too, must awake, or prove insensible to their position, and unfaithful to their principles, their country, and the world—and consequently to him whose stewards and witnesses they are, in the midst of corrupt churches, and of an ungodly nation. These points merit a more extended consideration.

SECTION I.

OF THE PRESENT POSITION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

During no past age, in the history of your country, did your denomination ever occupy a position so full of interest, advantage, and deep responsibility, as at this moment. Its condition, in the days of the Common-

wealth, may not for an instant be compared with it. Its views and sphere were then confined to narrow limits; its numbers comparatively small; and its organization very imperfect. Its liberties and privileges, likewise, hourly hung in the balance of a dread uncertainty; and the evils, which wise men always feared, in the course of a short generation, fell upon it. Its sun went down at noon; a long night of exclusion and persecution set speedily in; and tribulation and sorrow encompassed the path of your fathers. The battle of true religious and civil liberty in England was, nevertheless, still fought—fought by them — and though few, limited in resources, and surrounded on every side by a mingled host of mighty assailants, they remained unconquered; and maintained, from age to age—with gradually improving prospects—the unequal but glorious conflict, till your day came, and you received from the hands of the last generation of the honoured dead, the colours, the sword, and the shield, that you might carry on the struggle, and in turn commit the cause to your children.

The lines have fallen to you in more pleasant places, and you have a better heritage. The set time to favour you has at length come. On whatever hand you cast your eyes, appearances are more or less favourable; and in many quarters there is much to encourage your hearts, and to inspire the certain hope of the ultimate triumph of your principles. If you look at Scotland, you behold a new body of sister societies stretching over the whole land, from Berwick to the Orcades, and from the Solway to Peterhead, every where exhibiting the New Testament model, and bearing their honest testimony against the corruption

of a dominant church. Nor has their light shone in vain; it has at length penetrated the minds of multitudes in all parts of the country. The dissenting denominations of Scottish Presbyterians—bodies both numerous and powerful—have been led to embrace the great fundamental principle of your polity, which has worked among them the most surprising transformations—all tending to purity of fellowship, simplicity of worship, love, union, activity, and usefulness. Scotland is, in a word, filling with your principles and your brethren. The consequences of this upon the future operation of your tenets, and your coming position in England, it is impossible to calculate. All things in Scotland are rapidly preparing for that union of hearts, that league of love, and that covenant of truth between you and them, which the events of Providence are hastening on. If you look at Ireland, you behold, also, several of your great principles animating millions, and operating with resistless force upon the minds of men—a conviction having seized a great nation, that the kingdom of Christ ought not to be connected with the kingdoms of this world—and, that it should be upheld and diffused by the voluntary contributions of its members. In that country, too, there is sown a seed of the true Scriptural churches, which, although but as a handful of corn on the tops of the mountains, will, in due season, bear fruit, and shake like Lebanon.

In England, how changed is your position! The government begins to appreciate your character, and it acknowledges the justice of some of your remaining claims. A foul stigma has been removed from the character of your churches by the abolition of the Test and Corporation

Acts. You have been admitted to your place as Englishmen, within the pale of the British constitution. Every post and place in your native country is now open to you. The voice of your members may be heard in the British Parliament. You now wield a large portion of the power enjoyed by the corporations of the empire. The general press is strongly enlisted on the side of your unsatisfied demands, and of your great principles; nor are they without their advocates in the national universities. The literati of the three kingdoms, to a great extent, delight to do them homage.

Among yourselves, too, as a denomination, there is much to cheer. There is a measure of mutual acquaintance and of sympathy, hitherto unknown. Your numbers are greatly on the increase; but your moral power is much greater than your numbers. Your seats of ministerial education are, also, both augmenting and improving. The erection of Highbury College—of Spring Hill College—the transfer of the Institution of Wymondley to London, and of that of Blackburn to Manchester—are events which merit grateful notice. Then there is the erection of the London University, with its present and ultimate consequences—the establishment of a most important monthly periodical,* and an able newspaper,† both faithfully devoted to your interests—while that Review,‡ to which the cause of liberty, literature, sound piety, and Congregational principles, already owes a debt of lasting gratitude, has not only not decayed with years, but has renewed its strength, and holds on its honourable and beneficent course in an ascending altitude. These are considerations of great

* Congregational Magazine. † The Patriot. ‡ Eclectic Review.

moment, which ought to excite unfeigned thankfulness. Last, not least, there is the establishment of the CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES. The importance of this great measure—carried out with godly simplicity, energy, zeal, and perseverance—cannot be fully estimated, until after the lapse of many years yet to come—since that importance must be measured by utility—and the utility of such a confederation requires considerable space for its complete development. Time is required for plants of this description to become rooted and grounded in the love of a large and wide-spread denomination. The days assigned to half a generation will be necessary to its thorough establishment, to the perfection of its plans, and to the maturing of its power. Union, moreover, is a lesson which Congregational Dissenters have been slow to learn; and which not a few have long looked upon in the light of an enemy, or at least of a suspicious friend. The great principle of Independency has oft-times been carried beyond its legitimate boundary—a step whereby the power of the denomination has been lamentably enfeebled, and its extension limited. Independency, however—true Scriptural Independency—is separation in union. Congregational churches resemble the descendants of the sons of Israel, who, though divided as families, were closely and fraternally united as a tribe.

The value and importance of union are admirably exemplified among the churches of the sister sect in Scotland. That was a bright day for the cause of Independency in the North, which beheld the formation of the CONGREGATIONAL UNION—a day "much to be remembered"—for then, in no small measure, was determined

the question of "life or death" to that body, From that time the star of hope set in: and it dates the commencement of a new era in their history. It has revived interests, which were almost extinct—it has aided weak churches, in maintaining a useful existence—it has planted new churches, and nursed them till they gathered strength —it has, for many years, supported long and laborious itinerancies throughout almost all the destitute districts—highland and lowland—of the nation. It has promoted, to an unprecedented degree, Christian intercourse among the pastors, and brotherly affection among the churches.

The Scottish CONGREGATIONAL UNION is not simply a name and a semblance—it is a thing—a substantial and a most beneficent reality. There is not a presbytery in that nation, which can, for a moment, be compared, in respect of unity, either among its churches or its pastors, with the Congregational body. It has all the alleged good of the Presbyterian system, without its real or imaginary evils—and a vast remainder of good which that system has yet to acquire. The fears, too, with which many of the churches beheld its formation, have proved groundless —and have long since vanished away. The UNION has been found, not only perfectly compatible with the Congregational principle, but a scheme of unmixed utility—of unbalanced advantage. Had the Rev. John Watson of Pinkieburn, Musselburgh, its venerable secretary, and its most efficient promoter, done nothing else, his has been an important life, and he has much reason to be grateful, that he has been permitted to render to the cause of Christ so distinguished a service.

In a word, you are surrounded by a multiplicity of provi-

dences, all of which, as with one voice, bid you go on in the strength of the Lord God! You must, however, keep in mind, that these auspicious circumstances involve responsibilities of no common character. They are not conferred for your own sakes, but for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. It is, therefore, your imperative duty, to follow them up, with the energy of faith and the zeal of love. If you do so, the Lord will bless you yet more and more.

But this is only one view of the subject. While these things appeal to grateful hope, there are other events and signs of the times, which may well excite concern and serious apprehension. The Establishment of the country is aroused to efforts without precedent. The Bishop of Chester, speaking of the wants of his diocese, and of a call which he made upon his people, says—"That call has not been made in vain. In every part of the diocese, according to the degree of exigency, it has been nobly responded to. One spirit seems to animate the whole. To whichsoever side we look, we find here what must gratify. It is gratifying, that we are thus recovering our population to the church. It is equally gratifying, that so many should be engaged in this object, and that the sums which these churches have cost have been provided, with only two exceptions, through the private bounty of the community. The spirit, which has so brightened our prospects here at home, is not confined to a single district, but is felt throughout the land, in all its length and breadth. A sense of common interest has been awakened, a conviction, that the destitution of one province is the concern of others—that when one member of a national church suffers, others suffer with it. The effect is mani-

fested by the attempts which are making on every side—and which, I trust, will never be diminished, till the success has been complete—to fulfil the great design of our Establishment, and render our church a light, to lighten every man that comes within its world. I trust, that we shall proceed to erect churches, to multiply labourers, to provide fresh means of instruction, and adapt them to the various circumstances of our people, till, from infancy to age, from the baptism to the burial, every individual may receive from our church, as from an affectionate and venerated parent, the things belonging to their peace, and pertaining to life and godliness." The same charge states, that, in "the most needy districts of Lancashire, the effective force of the church is more than doubled."*

These passages may suffice to indicate the feelings and intentions of the English church; and every way in accordance with them, are those of the Scotch Establishment. One of her best and most eminent men lays down the duty of the kirk in these emphatic words:—"Prompt and decisive measures must be taken to cover the length and breadth of the land with the means necessary for the religious instruction and spiritual welfare of the people. Every part of the country must be broken down into manageable districts; each of these must be provided with a church and a pastor. We need more churches—hundreds and thousands of additional churches."† After all this, there can be no mistake as to the aim and object of both bodies of the established clergy. That aim and that object are, in the highest

* Bishop of Chester's Third Charge, pp. 21, 22, 25, 27.

† Hamilton's Life and Remains, vol. ii. pp. 53, 54.

degree, honourable to their principles, their character, and their office. Justice, consistency, religion, demand this of men professing to cherish their views. Did we embrace their principles, and occupy their places, we should feel in duty bound to pursue a similar course, although certainly not with means derived from the pockets of those who differed from us. Granting all this—as we most sincerely do—we, in turn, claim the right of exercising a judgment on these proceedings, and of considering in what way they are likely to affect the real interests of religion—the advancement of the true spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The erection of new houses for the worship of God, in connection with the Establishment, if their pulpits be filled with evangelical ministers, we hold to be an unspeakable good, but a good allied to much evil—and we require to see it advance under certain conditions, before we can bid it God-speed. If indeed the choice lay betwixt this and an absolute famine of the word of life, we should rejoice in it with our whole heart, and even consider our aid, in whatever shape bestowed, well deserved. But, if it were practicable to meet the wants of the country by a purer system, we should certainly endeavour, by all imaginable means within our power, to pre-occupy the ground. We are constrained to confess, that were hundreds and thousands of churches, so called, erected, and Dr. Hamilton's idea of an Establishment realized, we should consider the work of Christianizing the country but half accomplished; and we should also consider, that the half which had been done, rendered that which remained doubly difficult of achievement. "With the New Testament in our hands, and with the experience of past ages,

together with present facts, before our eyes, we feel constrained to believe that—notwithstanding all the good which is found in connection with the evil—the political frame-work and the spirit of the church of England, in its existing condition, as by law established, its incorporation with the state, and the aspect which it presents as the national religion, render it, by far, the most formidable of all the external impediments which present themselves to the advancement of Christ's spiritual kingdom, in the hearts of men, throughout the land."*

Is it not then clear, that whatever extends this church augments those impediments? And is it not equally clear, that you, as a body, are called, by the united voice of piety, of principle, and of prudence, to anticipate these movements? A timely adoption of the plans which have been here propounded will save a world of subsequent labour, difficulty, and trial, in connection with attempts to evangelize the nation.

The extension of the establishment is the certain diffusion of the forms of godliness, independently of its power; the power, in part, may mingle with the form, but the form may subsist, in perfection, without the power. This view is thus set forth by one of the most enlightened men of our times, the celebrated author of the "Protestant:"—"This is the bane of an endowed church; and, I believe, no man who knows the deplorable facts of the case will deny, that, from this alone, Scotland has suffered above measure. Thousands every year have been left to perish in ignorance of the way of salvation, while what was

* Present State of Religion in England, and the Impediments to its Advancement, p. 21.—Library of Ecclesiastical Knowledge.

called a Gospel ministry was established amongst them, and maintained for instructing them; and when really faithful men have gone voluntarily to preach in such parishes, they have found great obstruction in the presumption of the people, that they were *Christians already*, and did not need the message of mercy, which is the substance of the Gospel—whereas, but for the parish church and minister, they would have been addressed with more effect in their true character of heathens." If the present notions of the Church Establishment shall once be realized, you will find, that the extension of your body will be an arduous enterprise. The declared intention is, to absorb the entire population! To this the movements of the hierarchy are all tending; and the views which they cherish are as comprehensive and sagacious, as their object is vast and ambitious. They have combined patience with energy; they do not expect to realize the mighty project *per saltum*. Their doctrine is, that the summit cannot be reached at once; that "that which has been gradually lost must be gradually regained." *—Like wise men, they look for their harvest only from time and toil, but, in this way, they look for it with boundless confidence. And assuredly, if to stretch the mantle of mere profession from the one shore to the other of our illustrious isle were enough, they may, with their measureless resources, undoubtedly succeed. The church of England has means sufficient to accomplish it; but when effected, how miserable a consummation!

You know but little, in England, of the mischief of a wide-spread and all but universal profession; and can

* Bishop of Chester's Third Charge, p. 23.

scarcely conceive of the amount of obstruction which it presents, and ever will present, to the progress of your principles. Your brethren of the North, who have had bitter experience of its baneful effects, stand forth to be your teachers. They thus record their testimony:—"We altogether dissent from the sentiment of those who admire the system of general profession, which national churches extend throughout a country. Better far would it be, for the interests of vital godliness, if things were allowed to appear what they are. Better far would it be, that the spiritual nakedness and deformity, which prevail in many a portion of society, should be seen, than that a veil of nominal Christianity should hide it from view, and rottenness and death be allowed to lurk undisturbed beneath. It would be a grand advantage to the church and to the world, if men were allowed, without restraint, to profess themselves, as to religion, just what they are. Then the latter would not be encouraged in ruinous self-deception; nor the former carnalized by the example and association of formalists, that are acknowledged as Christians. Then the church would see, that a large proportion of those whom they are contributing to deceive, as Christians, are of the world, lying in wickedness, whom they might save by telling them that they need a Saviour." *

Arise, then, brethren, and work the work of God! As you would deprecate an augmentation of the difficulties attending the instruction and salvation of your fellow-countrymen, hasten to occupy the fair fields, which are ripe unto the harvest. All England is before you—go forth on every side, and possess the land. Wait not till

* Christian Herald, September, 1827.

the fountains of formality be yet more fully broken up, and their baleful waters overspread the country. The loss of every hour may cost your posterity the labours of a year. As you would avert the sorest calamity, with which your native land could be visited, endeavour, as much as in you lies, to prevent the extension of a corrupted Christianity, by quickly diffusing your own principles, like a flood, from one end of the island to the other. Wait until the hierarchy has had time to "supply to the dwellers in every street, and lane, and cottage, of our land, *efficient pastoral superintendence*, and the public ordinances of the church" *—that is, wait till every man of the millions of England is fairly manacled, and chained, and fettered to the national altar; and then you will find England to have become a second Ireland—where every dwelling-place, from the city mansion to the rural cabin, has long been *tabooed*, and all their inmates, whether clothed in silks or rags, have long been appropriated, and set apart, the vassals of a swarming, and active, and all-powerful priesthood—and where all attempts to instruct and convert the population are utterly desperate. The clergy know, that if you are first, the field is yours; and that they may then build edifices, but your disciples cannot be drawn off to them. The Bishop of Winchester tells his clergy, speaking of the Dissenters, that "they will doubtless put in their sickle first, if the appointed husbandman is absent, or will go into some neglected part of the field, if the labourers already employed are too few to reap it." † So let it be. You may now go forth, on every side, throughout the rural districts, and

* Wilberforce on the Parochial System, p. 28.
† Primary Charge, p. 52.

pick up the gleanings of the spiritual harvest, where, not merely handfuls, but ridges, and whole fields, have been left; or you may repair to the towns and cities, those immense "vallies, which stand so thick with corn below."—Go then—go and reap a glorious harvest of immortal souls!

SECTION II.

OF THE DUTY WHICH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES OWE TO THEIR PRINCIPLES.

Your principles are those of eternal truth. Your appeal is to the law and to the testimony, as the infallible standard of right and wrong, in matters ecclesiastical. You believe that the churches, which obtain among you, are, in all their main principles, such as those which were formed under the immediate superintendence of the Eternal Spirit. You believe this as firmly as you believe the Gospel of mercy. You believe that, over all the earth, wherever Apostolic footsteps trod, churches were formed in the same manner, and on the same model. You believe, that, in every clime, the diffusion of the Gospel was just the multiplication of such churches. You believe, that it was the Saviour's will, and that it is still the Saviour's pleasure, that such churches should overspread the world. You believe, that this is essential to his own glory—to the good of his flock—and to the harmony of his fold. You believe, that no other species of church polity is adapted to universality, and that the kingdom

of Christ must one day become universal. You believe, that to distribute these churches throughout all lands, will be, to diffuse the seeds of civilization and of civil liberty among mankind, as the accompaniments of salvation; and that theirs is the only form, which is adapted to every government of every clime, and to man, in every stage of social improvement.

Your principles have gained upon your hearts, from the channel of their transmission; they have come down to you, endeared by the tenderest remembrances; they are principles, for which your fathers suffered, in many cases, the loss of all things—for which they languished in the dungeon, were driven into exile, and perished at the stake! Dear to you, however, on these and on a variety of other grounds, as these principles are, you value them, not as an end, but as a means—not as your father's, but as Christ's. To you, it would be a poor consolation, to behold the entire population of England, Scotland, and Wales, gathered up into Independent churches, and carefully observing all those things which go to constitute the Congregational order, while the whole of their religion consisted merely in this attention to your cherished forms. You hold, nevertheless, that the Scripture form is essential to the healthful operation of the spiritual power; and for the sake of the power, you are tenacious of the form. Regard to your principles, then, demands attention to the following things; nor can you, with a good conscience, be satisfied, till they have commanded the homage and the hearts of all the faithful in the British empire.

First. *Purity of Fellowship.*—The New Testament church

comprises all, in every nation, who have been born of the Spirit, who have exercised repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Such companies of these, as live near one another, and come together, on the first day of the week, to observe whatsoever Christ hath commanded, are churches like unto those which were planted by the Apostles; and each of them is a type or representation of the whole church, or family of God in heaven and earth. There is nothing national in their state or character—they know nothing of nations, as such, nor nations of them. Christ is their sole head, and king, and lawgiver. His word is the only rule of their conduct. They know nothing of sublunary sovereigns further than requiring—as an act of obedience to Christ—that their members, as individuals, be subject to the "powers that be," in all things which do not interfere with their obedience to Christ. The laws of Christ's kingdom are made for his own subjects only; nor can they be applied to any other. Love to God, to his Son Christ Jesus, and to one another, is the governing principle of obedience in his kingdom. If this fail, there is no substitute for it. But this omnipotent principle cannot operate where it is not—no power of the magistrate can make it bear upon the character and conduct of collective masses of worldly men, who are still enemies to God, hateful and hating one another.

Such is the Christian church. What is a national church? It is a mere worldly kingdom, governed by worldly laws administered by worldly magistrates. "To get Christian churches moulded into a national form, and to embrace whole kingdoms, was the master-piece of the

devil's policy."* Their formation was an act of treason against Christ; and the sovereigns who act as heads and rulers of such churches are usurpers of the authority of the "Lord of all." Let any man, for example, examine the great fundamental law of the Church of England, viz. "That archbishops, bishops, and archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical persons, have no manner of jurisdiction ecclesiastical, but by and under the king's majesty, the only undoubted supreme Head of the Church of England, to whom, by holy Scripture, power and authority is given, to hear and determine all manner of causes whatsoever, and to correct all sin and vice whatsoever."

Let any man, we say, look at this law—a law, which has been distinctly confirmed in after ages, and is still in force—let any man examine this law, and investigate carefully its working in the Establishments of this country, and say, what is the duty of the Congregational body? Are not the laws of Christ a nullity in national churches? Is it not, however dreadful, an undeniable fact, that there is, confessedly, no discipline whatever in the Establishment of England, and little more in that of Scotland? Is not its fellowship a mixture, in which carnal men exceedingly outnumber spiritual men? Did not Principal Bailie, of Glasgow—one of the representatives of the Church of Scotland in the Westminster Assembly—in his complaints against the Independents, of which the most grievous was, that "they would receive no persons to their communion, but those who gave evidence of being converted"—affirm that, on this principle, "they would not receive one in forty of the best reformed churches?"

* "The Protestant's" Letter to a Covenanter, Let. i.

And was not this uttered at the time, when the Church of Scotland is understood to have attained her utmost degree of purity? *

Here, then, is the testimony of one of the most eminent ministers of his age and country, who unhesitatingly avows that not "one in forty" of the members of the purest national church gives any evidence of conversion to God! Is it not, then, with your views and convictions, the solemn duty of every man of your body, to stretch every nerve to correct this dreadful state of things, by the diffusion of your Scriptural principles? Does not respect for the authority of Christ and the glory of his name—does not regard for the souls of men thus deceived and perishing by millions—and does not concern for the purity and preservation of your own churches, which are in not a little peril, and which have already suffered unspeakably from their vicinity to such corruption —do not all these considerations, as with the voice of the Archangel, demand of you, to move heaven and earth—by all holy, and practicable, and peaceful methods—to rectify these deadly disorders?

By what methods is this to be accomplished? Diffuse the knowledge of your own principles. This is the best antidote. By itinerant lectures—by public meetings—by tracts and books—by the periodical press—and above all, by a preached Gospel, and by the planting of Scriptural churches in every place, seek and strive to gather into Congregational Societies all that fear the Lord, and have tasted that he is gracious; and then "teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded them."

* See "The Protestant's" Letter to a Covenanter, Let. i.

Second. *Scriptural Administration of Ordinances.*—The ordinances of the Gospel are only another mode of dispensing the Gospel itself; and, next to the Gospel, it is of the utmost importance, that these ordinances be properly administered. This rectitude of administration requires, that they shall be dispensed to proper persons, and in a proper manner. Now it is undeniable, that, both in Scotland and in England, the state of the ordinances, in the national churches, is, in both these respects, as deplorable as the general state of the Gospel ministry. Nay, it is unspeakably worse; there is a pure administration of the Gospel, in many parishes of both the Establishments, but in no parish is there a pure and Scriptural administration of the ordinances. In addition to much that is wholly Papistical, in respect of manner, there is, as to persons, an utter confusion of all distinctions—a most revolting prostitution of sacred symbols—a fearful violation of all Scriptural principle, attended with the most frightful havoc to the souls of men! To expound, and to expose the enormities of the national system, with respect to baptism, or to the Lord's supper, would be to fill volumes. Presuming on your knowledge of these most monstrous perversions, we ask you, how long you mean to stand by, as apparently indifferent spectators? Are these matters, in which you can safely profess to have no concern and to be neutral? Are you not, as a body, called to be witnesses for God? Does not the Lord Jesus Christ hold you responsible for the use which you make of your clearer light and more accurate acquaintance with his royal pleasure? Are you not as much bound to make war against perversions of

Gospel ordinances, as against perversions of Gospel doctrine? Are not the former as perilous as the latter, to the souls of men? Does not fidelity to the great Protestant principle, and to the Congregational principle, demand of you the assumption of a very different tone, and the prosecution of a very different course?

Brethren! Is there not a cause for your suspicious silence upon these points? Is there not something amiss at home? If so, confess your transgression to the Lord, and he will forgive you the iniquity of your sin. Inquire into the state of matters among yourselves; and, having rectified whatever is wrong, go forth into the field of Christian profession, and strain every power to bring over Christian brethren to the obedience of Christ. Are the prevalent abuses of baptism and of the Lord's supper, in our land, to last for ever? Is it not in your power, on every hand, to force on a thorough Scripture reformation? Increase your own purity to the standard of the New Testament—through the preaching of the Word multiply your numbers, by thousands, and tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands—and then let your voice be heard on high, and that voice will ere long be irresistible! Lay aside all the Popery, in all its shapes and shades, which you now share, in common, with the Establishment—in every thing put on the strength of a godly, primitive simplicity. Let the difference between you and the Establishments be as distinct and as wide as a complete Scriptural reformation can make it. The wider this distinction is—the better. Do this, and victory in the end will be yours!

Assail ecclesiastical corruption, south and north, east and west, within the Establishment and without it—with

unsparing hand, and without respect of persons. Assail it first by your *example!* Let your pure, primitive pattern plead your cause! No orator—no advocate—can be compared with a shining example! Let the conflict be carried on, with the weapons of Scripture, in the spirit of Scripture; and let it know no end, till the truth shall triumph by the universal administration of Scripture ordinances, in a Scripture manner, and upon Scriptural principles!

Whatever some gentle spirits may affect to think, to this at last the matter must come. The present state of our country, with regard to its religious aspect, cannot always continue; nor can it be too speedily changed.—The course which we are urging, and that course alone, can produce ultimate union among the people of God, and gather into one sepulchre the sinful sectarian distinctions which now so lamentably prevail, and keep the best of men asunder. You cannot—you dare not—rest satisfied till every communion-table be open to every Christian, and shut against every man who is obviously not a Christian; and till every pulpit be open to every faithful minister of the Gospel of salvation. Be not deceived! Let the signs of the times instruct you. The hollow truce is at an end. The Establishments have sounded the trumpet of war with Dissent—a war of extermination! Dissenters must now prepare for the coming conflict; for Dissenters, as such, must, at a period not exceedingly remote, either conquer or die!

The spirit of Popery has again become incarnate in the majority of the clergy of both Establishments;* and it is

* Since the month of March, when this essay was delivered in for adjudication, various events which have occurred up to the present

time for Dissenters generally, but especially for *you*, to look to themselves. Of all religionists, *you* are by far the

time,* have led the writer to turn his thoughts to the subject of English Popery with increased anxiety—for it had been previously occupying his attention. He is, however, free to confess, that his concern increases as his knowledge of the subject extends. In addition, therefore, to the undoubted fact asserted in the text, he would now add some fresh matter.

Great Britain at this moment contains a mighty nucleus of matured and perfect Popery, about which all kindred materials may gather. If Roman Catholic orators and writers may for once be credited, there are about *two millions* of Catholics in England and Scotland. Liverpool alone comprises about 100,000; Glasgow also contains nearly 100,000; Edinburgh, although not a commercial city, numbers between 14,000 and 15,000; while, forty-five years ago, it reckoned only eight or ten Catholic heads of families. This may serve as a sample of the cities and greater towns; but the seeds of the system are thickly scattered throughout the whole of the commercial districts of Great Britain; and on every hand splendid edifices are rapidly rising for its idolatrous worship. Such are the present state, and the future prospects of our once Protestant country. Any observation, however, on this posture of affairs, is generally met with the cool reply—"Oh, no doubt of it; they are very numerous; but they are not English converts; they are chiefly Irish emigrants, and their offspring."—Well, does this diminish the peril, or absolve us from the necessity of adopting means to check the progress of the dreadful evil? When the pestilence rages, and the earth groans under the heaps of the slain, will it suffice to set all right, to say—"Oh, this is no doubt a very terrible visitation; but, nevertheless, it is not of British origin; it was brought from Smyrna?"

But, other considerations apart, this is not a correct view of the subject. Popery is making converts in England, as well as elsewhere; some of them exalted in rank, and great in influence—for the bulk of our highest classes are just as ignorant of Divine things, and as liable to become the dupes of Popish delusion, as the humblest. The Papal boast is, that—"Throughout Europe, converts are thronging at the gates of the old temples—from those first in rank and highest in talent, down to the lowest and humblest." Such was the magnificent declaration of O'Connell at the first annual meeting of the Catholic Institute of Great Britian, held on June 6, 1839. The establishment, in the face of Europe, of this Institute, with an English earl at its head, for the avowed object of diffusing Popish tenets, is an event which speaks

* August 21st.

most hateful to Churchmen of every class. This honourable hatred is your birthright. For this, your fathers ob-

volumes; the very report of the fact may well cause the ears of thinking men to tingle! Surely, it is time, then, to resort to curative processes—if such there be—and to preventive measures, if any are practicable. The waters are rising: and, unless the fountains can be dried up, at no distant period the deluge will be universal and complete. The utmost is to be feared from the rapid increase of the Popish population of England alone; but what shall be said, when we add to this circumstance, the vicinity of Great Britain to Ireland—that teeming fountain of human life, whose overflowing streams are ever pouring into the ports of England and Scotland?

These facts, sufficiently alarming in themselves, acquire vast aggravation from the rapid and wide-spread departure from the great principles of the Reformation now going on in the Church of England. The able lay author of the celebrated "Essays on the Church," himself a zealous Episcopalian, thus writes on this subject, with which he is intimately acquainted:—"Half a century back, men would have thought it utterly impossible, that, in a few short years, a system could grow up within the Church of England, so closely approximating to Romanism. Yet this is actually occurring before our eyes; and a brief three or four years has sufficed to develop *a perfect system of modified Popery, not professed by two or three isolated individuals merely, but extensively maintained and taught throughout the empire.*"—Page 282.

Such are the signs of the approaching conflict. It is now time for the "princes" of Dissent, both English and Scotch, to "arise, and anoint the shield." All that is here intended, is to "put a trumpet in every man's hand," with which to sound, not a weak, but a too well-founded alarm. The Scottish and English Congregational churches have each already supplied a champion, in this great cause, worthy of it and of themselves—the late lamented William M'Gavin, a deacon of the church assembling in Nile-street, Glasgow, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Greville Ewing, and the Rev. Dr. Fletcher, then of Blackburn, now of Stepney. The masterly work of the former, "*The Protestant*," comprised in four volumes, is the most copious Catholic discussion of modern times; and it says much for the spirit of the country, that notwithstanding its cost and magnitude, it has reached some ten or twelve editions. Still, from the looseness and diffusiveness, from the size and price of that great work, and from other drawbacks connected with its original object and its periodical appearance, it can never become the *book of the million*; that honour, at least, must be conceded by it to the polished "Lectures" of Dr. Fletcher—a work expressly constructed to meet *Popery as it is*—Popery as it existed in Lancashire, its English stronghold, during the author's

tained a patent of precedency purchased by blood! Your faith is detested by all High Churchmen; and your order is abhorred by both the High and Low. Methodistic Dissent is viewed with complacency by many Churchmen in the south; — and Presbyterian Dissent, until it began to manifest voluntary propensities, was treated with similar courtesy by Churchmen in the north; — but "every shepherd was" not more "an abomination in Egypt," than every Independent is, in both England and Scotland. It is for you to heighten the reputable odium, by a still nearer approximation to Scripture; for on Scripture principle — not on policy — you must make your ultimate stand. "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth; let them return to thee, but return not thou unto them; and I will make thee unto the people a fenced brazen wall, and they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, to save thee and deliver thee, saith the Lord."

Fathers and brethren! suffer the word of exhortation. You must deal more justly with your principles than you have hitherto done. On this point there is a spirit abroad, among you, which has operated most ruinously upon the interests of Scriptural truth, and of New Testament order.

residence of nearly twenty years in the very heart of it. This work, from its candour, its accuracy, its eloquence, and its great argumentative power, is singularly adapted to do vast execution.

But while such works merit the most extended circulation, and the state of the times demands their diffusion to the widest possible extent, the matter must not rest there. The pulpit, the periodical press, and the Sunday-school, must be made to bear upon the Man of Sin, with skill, intensity, and systematic force. In wielding those weapons, the Congregational Union of England and Wales must put forth all its energies, to keep in check the Catholic Institute of Great Britain.

You treat your distinctive principles very much as the hyper-Calvinists treat the glorious Gospel; and in so doing, you have fallen into an egregious error. You are, taken as a whole, most lamentably deficient in holy zeal for their diffusion. You speak well for them, at each successive ordination; so that, on an average, every generation, in every church, forsooth, hears them once stated! This is to give your people "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little!" You go on, like the Antinomian, loudly praising your principles, and prophesying their ultimate triumph, but you leave them to achieve that triumph for themselves! Meanwhile, contrary principles are sustained by the giant power of national feeling — clothed with the might of British majesty— abetted by the hypocritical, thundering clamour of interested cupidity—and advanced by the nearly twice ten thousand skilful hands of three ecclesiastical corporations!

Look at the clergy, and you will perceive, that zeal for their principles is eating them up! In their great evangelical literary bulwark, you will find hoary men asking counsel of their contemporaries—not as to the best means of promoting their people's stedfast continuance in the faith, nor how the Gospel may be secured among them, but— as to "the most effectual measures, which a faithful clergyman can take, during his life, in order to prevent his flock from becoming Dissenters after his death!" * Such men—whatever may be thought of their wisdom, and certain other qualities, which may be of a doubtful nature— must be in earnest; and that very earnestness will prove, with many, the most convincing of all arguments.

* Christian Observer, May, 1804.

Fathers and brethren! is there not reason to fear, that not a few among you require to be still taught even the first principles of Dissent, as a high duty to the Head of the Christian Church? Is it not most mortifying, that Episcopalian periodicals should receive and publish, from the pens of professed Independents, contributions such as the following:—"It is not from the tracts of the 'Ecclesiastical Knowledge Society,' nor even from the declarations of Dissenting ministers, that the sentiments of Dissenters are to be learned; but rather from the vast numbers of Dissenters who attend Episcopal places of worship, who are the intimate friends of Episcopal ministers, and who are, in fact, bringing up their families in the paths of the church—in the expectation, that it will not be long, before those obstacles, which are really insurmountable, shall be removed" * — obstacles which the writer specifies, but which do not comprise even one of the main elements of the great question of Dissent!

Brethren, this is your own witness! What think you of his evidence? Whatever you may think, rest assured, that Churchmen believe it; and argue from it; and exult over it! An able correspondent, in the same periodical, reasons very vigorously against the potency and efficacy of your principles, and calculates the results of certain proposed parochial arrangements, as follows:—"Respectable Dissenters, under such an influence, would be undissented, and support the church; the refuse of Dissent would sink down into radicalism, and its native odiousness."† Nor is this the opinion of anonymous scribes only; respectable men, in the face of the empire, vent similar views. The Rev. W. H. Wilberforce, the successful competitor for

* Christian Observer, Jan. 1834. † Ibid May, 1836.

the prize of two hundred guineas, for the best essay on the "Parochial System," is one of these. This gentleman, after proposing a variety of measures, which would assimilate parochial congregations, in no small degree, to those of the Dissenters, proceeds to speculate upon their results. He argues, that the openly irreligious and profane would then stand aloof from the church; but, says he—"All others would seek and desire her communion, except such as were Dissenters on principle. How *few* of the more orderly and peaceable, of the existing Dissenting body, can be classed under this head! How many have become Dissenters almost of necessity, have been allured to the meeting, not from the church, but from the streets and the alehouse, and remain there partly from habit, partly because the claims of Christ's church, and the blessedness of her children, have never been set before them! Let our parochial system be made universally efficient, and we may hope, that we shall soon find them among us."* This language is explicit. These views are authentic. They come forth with the sanction of the "Christian Influence Society"—a body of most respectable men—and they are inscribed to "The Right Reverend Charles Richard, Lord Bishop of Winchester."

Fathers and brethren! there is much delusion somewhere! If these views be correct, your days are numbered, and your denomination will shortly be classed with the things that have been! Whatever be the extent of their accuracy, they at any rate supply information, from which, as wise men, it behoves you to profit. It devolves upon you, as a high and awful duty, to set this matter in a clearer light. Let no time be lost in putting an end to

* Wilberforce's Parochial System, p. 40.

the equivocal aspect, which a number of your churches now present to the Establishment of the country. If your principles be any thing, they are every thing. If your principles be not worth defending and propagating, renounce them! Go backward, or go forward—but stand not still! If Dissent be not a duty, it is a crime!

The question of your principles is deeply involved in the question of lay agency; and clear views of the one are indispensable to the full and effective operation of the other. Your first object is, to make men Christians, and to gather them into churches;—your second is, to make those churches Congregational;—and your third is, to convert those Congregational churches into one body, which, as with one tongue, shall speak for Christ—and as with one arm, shall act for Christ—and which, like the mystic wheels of the prophet, shall roll on in every direction, pouring around the light and truth of the Gospel.

SECTION III.

OF THE DUTY OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES TO THEIR COUNTRY.

Fathers and brethren! be entreated to awake, and to put on your strength. The time has fully come for more vigorous and extensive efforts to evangelize the different localities in which you are placed, than have ever yet been made. We trust it has been demonstrated, that this is imperatively demanded of you by the state of your country,

and by the character of your times, by your position and by your principles. You are diffusing the Scriptures through all nations, and sending your missionaries to every shore. Blessed be God for the honour thus put upon you! Neither are you wholly indifferent to the claims of the perishing millions in Great Britain. But, alas! your exertions are not equal to the awful crisis! They are "drawn unto death" all around you—they are sinking into the depths of perdition on every side—they are passing onward, in a mighty stream, to the judgment-seat, to be condemned to die! Oh! hasten to their rescue, and endeavour to pluck them as brands from the burning! The claims of home are prior to those of foreign climes; and if you can do no more for England, without doing less for the heathen, then let justice be done—let us discharge the prior debt which is due to our country. But this is not necessary. It is not so much money, as labour, that is wanted. We have thought too much of worldly substance; we have been too intent upon pecuniary arrangements; and have looked too much to pecuniary means for the accomplishment of that spiritual good, which hard work and heartfelt prayer alone can realize for us. We may increase our Christian agency to a prodigious extent, without augmenting, in any material degree, our pecuniary burdens. There is among you, as churches, a mine of moral wealth, which must be worked to better purpose than it has ever yet been. Your evangelical exertions, as a body, are not equal to your capabilities; nor are they worthy of your glorious principles and parentage. Your standing in the country, as a denomination, is not what it ought long ago to have been. Your antiquity

must not be forgotten, when we estimate your numbers and moral power. You have been long in the field; and you have, during a large portion of that period, enjoyed that field almost wholly to yourselves. You ought to have expanded greatly more, and to have multiplied your churches on every side. You, like others, long forgot, that one of the chief ends of the existence of Christian churches is, to enlighten the surrounding darkness; and to leaven, sanctify, and save, the whole lump of corrupt humanity within your reach. You have not extended your principles, and, with them, the Gospel of salvation, so far as you might have done. Much time and many precious opportunities are now lost, no more to return. God, be merciful unto you, and bless you, and cause His face to shine upon you!

But if millions have perished, whom you have not sought to save, and their spirits are placed beyond recal; there are still millions more walking in the same broadway, that leadeth to destruction. Their souls are not less precious than the souls of the generations which have passed away. What can be done to save those millions? Much every way, and by every person, can be done; and it can be done now, if you are sincerely willing to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty. The amount of power, which slumbers among you, and which may be roused into action, is hardly conceivable by those who have not reflected upon it. Nothing but devout resolution is wanting to increase your labours to a very great extent —an extent at least fourfold! Oh, how many are there in all your churches, who are doing nothing for the Lord! They live wholly to themselves, and act as if there were

not a perishing heathen in all the land! Were every one among you to keep a journal of his efforts for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of man, the results of a single year would be one of the most humiliating of all discoveries. The really active and useful portion of your churches is but a handful—in point of number—a most insignificant minority! The bulk of the wealth, time, talent, and influence, of your communion, is dormant, and God's cause stands all but solitary and friendless. Ah! brethren, the judge standeth at the door! Yet a very little while, and we shall no longer have the honour and privilege of pointing a sinner to the Lamb of God! You may now be co-workers with Christ, in the salvation of souls, for yet a few moments, but soon shall all the dwellers on earth be gathered to the sepulchre! Arise! oh! betake yourselves to the fields! Put in the sickle and reap a harvest of souls!

Christian pastors!—in this "day of rebuke and blasphemy," we look earnestly to you; under God every thing depends upon your spirit, example, and procedure. England stretches forth her hands, in imploring anguish, to you—the friends of the wretched—and her best friends! You are the natural and proper leaders of your flocks; and whithersoever you go, they will follow you. You, as a body, are the chief instruments of moulding the public mind. It is yours, then, with Apostolic feelings, to agitate the question of a half heathen nation, and a more than half heathen metropolis, in all its bearings; to press it upon the tender pity of your people, till they understand it—till they feel it—and till they rise from their sleep, and go forth, in the name and strength of the Lord, as banded hosts, against sin, ignorance, and all evil!

Let none of us suppose, that our circumstances preclude the possibility of our making attempts, in every possible way, to bring on a new era. Such attempts are, to some extent, every where practicable. Far more depends upon the will than upon the circumstances; and every where, men may work for God, to an extent, beyond common credibility. Let us only advance, and rouse the lion that reposes in the way; and all obstacles to the attempt to glorify God will vanish, like the dew of the morning. Let us go to work, in good earnest, as men who are toiling for eternity, who have taken up their cross, and who are serving the Son of God—the martyr King! Let none of us fall into the snare, which has been the ruin of so many of our brethren—the idea that the sphere which we occupy is too small or too great—the idea that we could do something any where but here. The hinderance is within, not without—and whithersoever we go, it will accompany us. Let us all, therefore, make the most of present of circumstances. All may do something—the feeblest may do much.

Christian pastors! awake, and sound the trumpet, and alarm a secure generation! Understand and magnify your office—ponder, and estimate aright, your dread responsibility! The power of character is great—the power of knowledge is great—the power of office is great—the power of the pulpit, rightly wielded, is altogether irresistible! God being your helper, there is no limit to your influence. O brethren! bestir yourselves! Death is reigning through sin—darkness fills the rural districts of the land—and gross darkness broods over its towns and cities. Call upon your churches then to arise and shine, for their light has

come, and the glory of the Lord has arisen upon them. Let things return to their ancient channel. Let all evangelical movements be viewed through the medium of the Apostolic period—and put far away from you childish prejudice against lay agency. The complete instruction of a congregation—not to speak of neighbourhoods, or villages—is too heavy for you; "you are not able to perform it yourselves alone." There are a number among you, for whom it is impossible that they should do much more than they are now doing. The alternative, therefore, is not, whether you, or laymen, shall do the work; but whether it shall be done by them, or be left wholly undone. Some of you are wearing away, through excess of toil; and yet your people are neglected, and on every hand your neighbours are perishing! "The thing that ye do is not good. Hearken to our voice, and we will give you counsel, and God shall be with you." Turn your whole souls towards the preparation and arrangement of lay agency. Clothe yourselves with the united power of your people. Unite them—classify them. Let them be as one well-compacted body, of which you are the soul. Men of God! animate—arouse—inspire the people! Put in motion the entire mass. Let every church become a spiritual camp, where every man is a soldier; and where all, even the children, know the use of arms! Then will the war of truth be prosecuted in the spirit of its origin; and our beloved land shall yet be filled with tokens of a Saviour's presence, and overspread with the triumphs of a Saviour's power!

Tutors, professors, and heads of Congregational colleges, permit us, with profound reverence for your characters and

functions, in conclusion, to address you. How honourable and awful is your position! You hold in your hands the destinies of your denomination. Under God, almost every thing depends upon you. What times you live in! It is your province and duty to train a ministry suited to those times—to send forth men "eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures"—men of ready pens and fluent tongues, and ample stores of various information—men of ardour, and energy, and intellectual activity—men versatile, capable of business, equally prepared to rule or serve, to lead or follow, in the cause of Christ—men who "count not their lives dear to them, so that they may finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." Such are the men to work the district system with delight, and to build up the walls of your Jerusalem.

The legal establishment of Christianity in our land has affected equally the standard of Christian contribution and of pastoral labour. The Congregational pulpits of England are properly resounding the protestation, that the standard of contribution must be raised, doubled and trebled by multitudes, before the world can be evangelized. A faithful scrutiny would lead to a similar conclusion respecting pastoral labour, in a like proportion of cases. Not a few Dissenting ministers of various sects, both in England and Scotland, are but cumberers of the ground. Their standard of duty is taken from the established clergy, not from the sacred Scriptures. It is time for you to interpose, and to erect the true standard of evangelical exertion; you must make it the subject of frequent converse and of solemn prelection. With energy, system, and a

little self-denial, pastoral labour may be exceedingly augmented.

Pastors will, in all respects, find their account in redoubled efforts. Habits of great activity will conduce equally to health and to usefulness. They tend equally to invigorate both mind and body. It is not physical exertion that cuts men off; but late hours, and excessive sedentary application, combined with neglect of proper exercise. Week night duties of all sorts, after a few years' experience, will not require a very large amount of premeditation from men of tolerable gifts and of thorough education. Careful Sabbath preparation, and constant courses of laborious theological study, are quite compatible with employments, such as are pointed out in our district system, every night in the week, Saturday not excepted. Such are the men whom the true church of Christ now demands, and cost what it may, she must have them. Of drones, monks, and sinecurists she has had enough. "Her present emergencies call only for *working men*—in the best sense of the phrase, WORKING MEN!"*

* "The Ministry we need:"—three inaugural discourses delivered at Auburn, Western New York, June 18, 1835, p. 58. The third of these discourses is by Dr. S. H. Cox, of Auburn; its republication in England might be attended with eminent usefulness. It is a noble discourse, which strongly resembles the splendid effusions of the late Dr. Mason, and is worthy of the best days of that great orator.

THE END.

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